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MARSH-COUNTRY RAMBLES

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MARSH - COUNTRY RAMBLES

BY

HERBERT W. TOMPKINS

AUTHOR OF 'HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS IN HERTFORDSHIRE,' ETC.

'I saw the marshlands drear and wide,
And many a ghost that strayed thereon'
GRAHAM R. TOMSON

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1904

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PREFACE

THESE chapters do not embody detailed descriptions of villages and towns which the writer has visited, or any summary of their history. For such information one turns to more ponderous tomes—to Morant, or Salmon, or Wright; or to the exhaustive 'History of Essex' now in course of publication. Such books are consulted; they are seldom read. They lack the interest of narrative.

If we would gain the attention of a child, we tell a story. The child, as Wordsworth puts it, is father to the man, and, other things being equal, the writer of narrative is most likely to engage the attention of men. For this reason I have, for the most part, written in the first person, touching upon history and legend in such manner as to interfere as little as possible with my narra-

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tive. My indebtedness to authors is acknowledged as occasion arises.

It is fortunate that all ramblers are not writers, or life would be too brief for the perusal of even their best reminiscences. Perhaps this addition to the literature of walking tours can only be excused on the plea that life is kaleidoscopic, lending itself, readily enough, to infinitely varied presentation. Men write of their rambles, as of their reading, again and again; each views such pleasures from his own standpoint; each has his story to tell, and cannot believe that it has been told before.

These rambles are recorded by one who derives perennial pleasure from the rambles of others. I have rambled in spirit with Johnson among the Hebrides; with Hazlitt in the 'green and hilly' country around Nether Stowey; with Stevenson in the Cevennes; with Daudet on the Island of Houat; with Mr. Henry James in Provence; with Mr. Andrew Lang where the Tweed 'courses through the keen and narrow rocks beneath the bridge of Yair.' It is, at best, a thankless task to follow where such men have trod, and even to write on similar themes may smack of presumption.

But I have made the venture and must abide the issue. 'Among their worthier offerings here is mine.'

'The Haunt of the Water-Rail' was printed in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, but has been in part rewritten; to the proprietors of that magazine I am indebted for permission to reprint it here.

VERULAM, SOUTHEND-ON-SEA,
February, 1904.

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THE WALKS THAT NEVER CAN BE MINE

AN UNORTHODOX BALLADE

(*With Apologies to Mr. Andrew Lang*)

THE Walks I cannot hope to take—
I see them with the inward eye :
There's Wordsworth strolling near the lake !
There's Bozzy on the isle of Skye !
To ramble with the great I sigh,
To watch with them the sun's decline ;
For such delights 'tis vain to cry—
The Walks that never can be mine !

Dozing, I see as in a trance
Bob Southey on the Quantock Hills ;
There's Stevenson in sunny France,
There's Goldsmith in the land of mills !
Would I might flee from all the ills
That poets to the town assign,
To share—the thought my spirit thrills—
The Walks that never can be mine !

Alas ! with Lamb I cannot walk,
Nor hear his puns or repartee ;
Nor share in Master Izaak's talk
Of anglers, by the winding Lea.
Such joys were not reserved for me,
Who now, where broader waters shine,
Dream of the things that ne'er can be—
The Walks that never can be mine !

ENVOY.

Reader, if you such wand can shake
As necromancers shook lang syne,
Recall past years, that I may take
The Walks that else can ne'er be mine !

MARSH-COUNTRY RAMBLES

I

TOWARDS THE MARSHES

A GLANCE at a map of Essex shows a coast much broken and indented—more so, on the whole, than that of any other English county except Cornwall. It is a coast of tidal rivers, creeks, and marshes ; the Colne, Blackwater, and Crouch, with their many tributaries, watering much of the county adjacent to the sea. The following rambles will be confined, with few exceptions, to the tracts of marshland east of the road which leads from Prittlewell to Maldon and Colchester, and south of the road from Colchester to St. Osyth —a land often regarded as flat, stale, and unprofitable, but, to those who know it well, full of interest and enduring charm. In these marsh-country rambles I shall endeavour to interest many classes of readers, and shall not hesitate

to record trivial incidents or wayside stories, especially when peculiar to the coast of Essex. We now realize that the highways, byways, and waterways of our own country, 'the land we love the most,' deserve to be explored before we travel farther afield, and have discovered that our antiquities and folklore are at least as worthy of study as the customs of cannibals or the superstitions of Malays or Bushmen.

Geologists tell us that the south-east portion of England, comprising at least the whole of East Anglia and Kent, was submerged during the Eocene period. It was, in fact, the latest part of our country to rise from the sea, and only by continued vigilance and labour can the sea be kept from asserting its old dominion over East Essex even now. About five years ago an unusually high tide flooded the Leigh marshes, burst through the sea-wall at several places, and did much damage near Fambridge Ferry and elsewhere on the Crouch. It overflowed a considerable part of Foulness Island, and the King's Head could only be approached in a boat, although that inn is surrounded by ditches capable of holding an immense quantity of water. Much of the pasture was spoiled, the farms sustained almost irreparable

damage, nor has the island yet recovered from that disaster.

The Essex marshes as we now see them are tracts of land reclaimed from the sea and protected by mud sea-walls, which are sometimes faced on the seaward side by large stones that strengthen and consolidate them. The marshes are used extensively for grazing purposes. These marsh-country pastures formerly supported a considerable industry. Many spots in East Essex bear the name or suffix of 'Wick'—a score of such may be counted between Shoebury and Colchester —a name which signifies a dairy. These dairies produced great numbers of cheeses made from ewe milk, which were highly esteemed. Norden, however, seems to have had no high opinion of the cheeses made on Canvey Island, where the names of North Wick, Knight's Wick, West Wick, Monk's Wick, and Farther Wick, still survive, for he wrote: 'It is onlie converted to the feeding of ewes, which men milke, and thereof make cheese (such as it is).'

My interest in Canvey Island and its surroundings was first awakened by Robert Buchanan's 'Andromeda' and Mr. Coulson Kernahan's 'Captain Shannon.' I had heard the island

described as a dreary, desolate spot, finally reclaimed from the tidal Thames by that enterprising worthy Joas Croppenburg and his helpers, inhabited in part by a few Dutch folk and haunted by sea-fowl. The pages of 'Andromeda' filled me with a longing to explore Canvey Island for myself, and to make that excursion one of several rambles on the Essex archipelago and the neighbouring marshes of the county.

Leaving London one afternoon in late autumn, we passed Upminster, so picturesquely scattered on the hillside; climbed Langdon Hill, where Arthur Young saw what he deemed the finest prospect in England; rattled rapidly through Pitsea Junction; and presently caught our first glimpse of South Benfleet and of its quaint old church, backed by the Hadleigh Hills. South Benfleet is associated with memories of the Danes, who erected strongholds here and at Sceobyrig—now known as South Shoebury and famous for defensive works of a far different order. The church of St. Mary the Virgin stands, if tradition speaks truly, on the site of a Saxon sanctuary, and retains some Norman work. It has one of the finest timber porches in Essex, a county which boasts many of these relics—always so interesting,

often so picturesque. Like the majority of old church porches, it faces the south, and still shows much of its once exquisite carving, its well-turned spandrels and mullions. On a pillar in the south aisle I saw some details of the church's history; the oldest portion is the western doorway, dating from the reign of Stephen. The massive, time-defaced tower appears disproportionately short by reason of the high-pitched roof of the clerestory; it dates from about 1390, and was formerly battlemented. Stone steps, leading to what was once the rood-loft, may be seen in the north aisle. Sometimes, when our Saxon forefathers defeated the Danes in battle, as they did at Benfleet, they flayed their prisoners alive and nailed their skins to the doors of neighbouring churches; it is quite possible that this church was thus disfigured when the fortress of Hastings was stormed, some of his family captured, and the Danish vessels burnt or sunk (*circa* 894).

This little Thames-side village was much frequented by smugglers in the good old days, who doubtless found very convenient inlets in Hadleigh Ray and Benfleet Creek. At low-water the Ray is one long stretch of ooze, in which gulls and other shore birds dabble; but at high-tide

there is sufficient water to enable barges to come up to Benfleet Wharf for a load of hay. You may still induce the older folk to spin yarns of the smuggling days; but, as will be supposed, such stories are not from personal memory, being little more than fragments of longer narratives familiar enough to a former generation. The romance of illicit trade is nearly forgotten at Benfleet, but I shall have more to say of it in another chapter.

Early in the morning, at the ebb of the tide, I passed over the planks and stepping-stones at the ferry station, and found myself upon a rude cart-track on Canvey Island. The island, as Buchanan correctly says, 'lies, a shapeless octopus, right under the high ground of Benfleet and Hadleigh, and stretches out muddy and slimy feelers to touch and dabble in the deep water of the flowing Thames.' As I touched island ground a curlew passed over my head in the direction of Leigh; some redshanks were wading in the ooze, and a few gulls were hovering over the marshes. Northwards the view was obscured by driving mists; but the Hadleigh Hills stood out clear against the sky-line, and looking eastwards I could see, in the farther distance, the ruins of Hubert de

Burgh's castle, overlooking the broad estuary of the Thames. An incident in the life of Hubert furnishes an interesting story, very pertinent to Essex ground. It was during the reign of Henry III. The times were turbulent; Hubert had become famous for much 'distinguished service,' but, falling foul of the powers that were, he fled for safety, and was captured at Brentwood. A smith was ordered to forge fetters for the captive, but on hearing that they were intended for Hubert de Burgh he refused to do so. We read that the Essex smith, sighing heavily, said: 'As the Lord liveth, I will never make iron shackles for him, but will rather die the worst death that is! . . . God be judge between him and you for using him so unjustly and inhumanly!' The story was told by Matthew Paris, Speed, and others, and repeated by Southey.

Canvey Island is about six miles in breadth from east to west, and is protected on the Thames side by the 'sea-wall.' From almost any point on the island you can see the craft on the river—the shrimping boats of Leigh, the many fishing-smacks, the brown-sailed barges, the great liners going seawards with the tide. Sometimes you see them loom indistinctly through the river fog, like

phantom ships, or like the vessels in some Dutch pictures; more often, however, the environs of Canvey Island, from Fobbing to Leigh, are bright with sunshine, and the Kentish and Essex coasts stand out in clear relief. As I made my way towards Canvey village the grass hummocks gave place gradually to low-lying meadows dotted with sheep; creeks and inlets were less conspicuous, and firmer ground, with a cottage here and there, was chiefly haunted by larks, linnets, and greenfinches. The village itself, partially hidden among trees, consists of a few small dwellings, some new, some very old. I noticed, near the covered pump, a quaint thatched round-house, bearing the date 1621—a genuine relic of Jacobean times, but, architecturally speaking, not very characteristic. A second round-house some little distance from the village is curiously adorned with shells, and looks even older than the other. The island, like many spots in this world, has its haunted house; an old road-mender pointed it out, but told me it had nothing to show. Nor would he repeat its story, which he thought not worth telling. I set him down as perhaps the most honest native I have met in all my many wanderings.

Close to Canvey village stands the church of

St. Katherine, faced with boarding, roofed by slates, and surmounted by a bellcote. On its south side is a small graveyard, where some islanders lie buried in hope of a joyful resurrection. Inside the church I found little of interest; it has a rood-screen, surmounted by a large cross, and several windows of stained glass of considerable beauty. But the story of this island church is interesting enough. A wooden structure was first erected by the Dutch settlers in the days of Charles I.; their pastor was one Dom Cornelius Jacobson. The church at South Benfleet was then the parish church of the English islanders; but this was two miles from the village, and when the Dutchmen built another nearer home the English parishioners sought to share it for their own use. Their request was refused; high words arose, and I am sorry to relate that the immediate precincts of the building were presently the scene of a sanguinary encounter. Moreover, the Dutch were left victors 'on the foughten field,' and retained their rights of sanctuary until many of them quitted the island, and, as the story runs, their church occasionally became a storehouse for contraband goods. It was not until 1712 that a new structure was erected by 'Mr. Edgar, an

officer in the victualling office,' and dedicated in honour of St. Katherine. I do not know how the new church fared when, rather more than twenty years later, the sea-wall in part collapsed, and the island was inundated ; but it was enlarged in 1745, mainly at the expense of one Daniel Scratton, of Prittlewell, and the improved structure was the church of the Canvey islander until it was rebuilt in 1875, and consecrated by the Bishop of Rochester. The living is now handsome when compared with that of the original English church, for we read that the cleric then appointed to preach twenty sermons each year received £10 per annum.

November is not a good month for botanical rambles, or I might have lingered upon the marshes and searched the sheltered ditches near the sea-wall for rare plants, thus following the example of good Master John Gerard, herbarist to James I., who knew well the waste places of Canvey and the country around 'Lee in Essex.' In his 'Herball'—some 1,600 folio pages, published in 1597—he has recorded his finding, 'in the greene places by the seaside at Lee among the rushes and in sundry places thereabouts,' the meadow saxifrage, lily of the valley, sea-spurge,

sea-lavender, and other plants. I can picture this diligent botanist of the old school coming down here from time to time from his garden somewhere near Holborn, searching the salt marshes of South Essex and the lowlands of the Thames Valley for such rare species as he desired, and rejoicing over them as one that finds great spoil. It was Gerard — 'laborious Gerard,' as Izaak Walton calls him—who saw, on the walls of Rayleigh Church, four miles from Hadleigh Ray, specimens of the beautiful wall-rue fern, the many *Asplenium ruta-muraria* of Linnæus. But rare plants, like rare butterflies and birds, have been sedulously collected since Gerard's day, and some of the seventy Essex species which he enumerated are now found about as often as the large copper or the bittern. A variety of dwarf willow is as plentiful as any tree on Canvey, except, perhaps, the sloe ; in a thorn-bush surrounded by many such willows I found a blackbird's nest containing one egg. The egg must have rested in that deserted nest since the spring, a sufficient testimony to the scarcity of boys on the island, for the nest was not two yards from the broad track called the Danish Causeway.

The afternoon was waning ere I reached the

Sluice House, otherwise called the Lobster Smack. It is a small hostel of the good old sort, close to the coastguard look-out on the sea-wall, where you may amuse yourself by guessing the age of the massive low rafters, or by chatting with the host, who has lived here for forty years. The Lobster Smack has been an inn since the days of Queen Bess, and was doubtless frequented by lawless men from the smuggling boats that ran into Hole Haven or Hadleigh Ray under cover of darkness. In later and more quiet years life in this old inn must have been somewhat monotonous; but things would become lively on occasion. A writer quoted by Mr. Beckett tells us that 'Teniers' favourite fiddler playing at an inn, and the people merry-making, is often reproduced at the Sluice House on a holiday or harvest-home.' But during my visit the weather did not invite us to outdoor merriment: we put our backs to the wall and our legs under the heavy tables; watched the flicker of the fire upon the oaken beams, exchanged a few anecdotes, and smoked our pipes in peace. I seldom spend an hour under such circumstances without recalling the words of Shenstone:

'Here, waiter! take my sordid ore,
Which lackies else might hope to win;
It buys what courts have not in store,
It buys me freedom at an inn.

Whoe'er has travell'd life's dull round,
Where'er his stages may have been,
May sigh to think he still has found
The warmest welcome at an inn.'

My cogitations were interrupted by one who, putting his head in at the door suddenly, announced that a queer-looking craft was in mid-stream ; so we clambered up the steps of the look-out to sight the stranger. I could see nothing more uncommon than a Dutch eel-boat ; but she was doubtless rigged in unusual fashion, for the men from the Lobster Smack watched her earnestly, and discussed her appearance in true riverside phraseology.

The way from South Benfleet or Canvey Island towards the East Essex marshes leads through Leigh, for centuries the home of a few fisher-folk, but now rapidly growing into a considerable town. Almost all the houses of new-comers, many of whom go to London daily, are scattered along the hillside, and the immediate neighbourhood of the quaint, winding High Street, barely above high-water level, is largely inhabited by men whose sires or even grandsires lived in the same house before them. Their old parish church, dedicated to St. Clement, is worth a visit. It is of Kentish ragstone, for the most part Perpendicular in style ; but the

chancel, rebuilt in 1872, is Decorated. The tower, with its single turret, is a conspicuous landmark for many miles around. But the view from Leigh Park, overlooking the ancient town and the estuary of the Thames, is the most notable feature of the district. It is indeed a commanding prospect, and early on a summer morning, when the Thames glitters like moving silver, affords a spectacle superior to what many a much-lauded watering-place can show. The opposite Kentish coast is low ; on your left, beyond the town, the river sweeps round towards Southend ; away in the far distance you may see a tiny white cloud rise suddenly as from the sea, then a faint boom falls upon the ear, and you know that the guns of Sheerness are at play—may they never be used to deal destruction and death ! As with other shore-side towns, Leigh should be seen from the water at sunset. Putting into the port from the direction of Canvey Point, a line of quaint cottages and cockle-sheds meets the eye ; old fishermen, and fisherboys, too, loiter on the foreshore ; the church stands sentinel over all ;

> 'And out upon the sea-line sails are brown ;
> White sea-birds, crying, hover ; soft shades fall,
> Deep waters dimple round the dripping oar,
> And last rays light the little fishing-town.'

In the year 1407, when London was visited by the plague, Henry IV. was staying at Leeds Castle in Kent. Being afraid to enter London, he determined to sail from Queensborough to Leigh, *en route* for Pleshey—the Plashy of Shakespeare's 'Richard II.' It chanced that some French pirates lay at the mouth of the Thames; they got wind of the royal trip, sailed up the river, captured four of the King's vessels, and chased the King's own ship into the port of Leigh. Henry charged Thomas, Lord Camois, who had directed his journey, with being privy to the whole affair, and had him arrested and tried before the Earl of Kent. Lord Camois was dismissed without a stain on his character.

II

WAKERING MARSH

THERE was every prospect of rough weather as I left Southend, and, crossing the railroad, set my face towards Southchurch. A stiff sou'-wester had buffeted my window throughout the night; it gathered strength as the day broke, and was loudly blustering as I paused upon the hillside to examine the Norman doorway in the church. Overhead the sea-gulls soared and poised; as I continued my way towards North Shoebury numbers of them were busy upon the freshly ploughed fields, snatching an early lunch among the rooks and starlings. And a goodly sight they were in the eyes of one who loves birds almost as much as books. An old rhyme, more widely known in the bonny West, came to memory:

> 'Sea-gull, sea-gull, sit on the sand;
> It's never fine weather when *you* come to land.'

Here they were, on land in great numbers, and, as

the event proved, they had brought rough weather to keep them company.

'Men scarcely know how beautiful fire is,' wrote Shelley, and Lowell, quoting the line, very naturally remarked that there are other things concerning which we are not overburdened with knowledge. Few persons have considered the beauty of the gulls. I have seen them near the Lydstep Caverns, on the coast of Pembrokeshire, resting on every coign of vantage or rocky ledge, while the storm-winds thundered in each cavernous hollow and hardly another living creature was in sight. I have peered over the high precipice of Beachy Head, and have watched them, apparently motionless, poised betwixt earth and heaven in the teeth of a tremendous gale. I have seen them following in the wake of steamers rounding the Needles, thick as midges on a summer's eve, and have watched them hover, thicker still, over the deck of a trawler off Caldy Isle, when the crew were gutting soles in the gray of the morning. But I have seldom found them so familiar, so evidently 'at home,' as on the coast of Essex. Like the poor, they are ever with us—dabbling in the ooze when the tide is out, haunting the sea-front boldly when the frost is hard,

drifting hither and thither in the strongest gale, or soaring immensely high on calmer mornings. We love them heartily, these bright, noisy, restless sojourners among us, so neatly dressed in blacks and grays and whites. Other birds are known by their graceful flight; but, on the whole, the gulls can show them all a wrinkle in this matter of aerial evolution. Their flight can hardly be portrayed in paragraphs. As Master Izaak Walton says of a fishing-reel, it is to be observed better by seeing one of them than by a large demonstration of words.

It is a pleasant ramble from Southend to South Shoebury, where you should notice the small, quaint church of Norman foundation, dedicated to St. Andrew, formerly attached to the Cluniac priory at Prittlewell. What picturesque, medieval memories are touched to life at the mention of these monkish Orders! We go back in thought to black-robed monks who plied their tasks and told their beads in this sanctuary by the sea 500 years ago; and to think of those monastic reformers—austerer Benedictines—is to think of Abbot Berno of Beaume, of the Order which he founded in the small village of Clugny on the Grône, and of the work inaugurated here by

Robert of Essex in the days of Henry II. Their history must be sought in other pages; but I remark, in passing, that the Clunaic monks, like those of most other Orders, waxed slothful and vicious in proportion as they waxed rich. To some, perhaps, they still speak eloquently, if only in echoes of that once familiar, pathetic appeal, 'Ora pro nobis.'

South Shoebury Church is marked on the map drawn by that honoured rambler and antiquary, John Norden (*circa* 1548-1626). On Norden's map there is no mention of Southend, nor does he name it in his 'Essex, discribed by Io. Norden, 1594.' The few houses standing in his day between Prittlewell and the north bank of the Thames were mostly inhabited by a few fishermen, and formed a scarcely separate hamlet. Subsequently the neighbourhood became known as South End in the parish of Prittlewell. This by the way; but the fact emphasizes the changes which have come to pass hereabouts. Close to this tiny graveyard at South Shoebury—where, whatever its aspect in those olden days, the monks were wont to wander—are now the cottages and barracks of Shoebury-ness, and the great guns thunder at unseasonable hours. Moreover, 'Pritewell, sometyme a market

towne,' now stretches southwards, not towards a few fishermen's dwellings, but to join issue with the already large town of Southend-on-Sea.

Wishing to spend some hours on Wakering Marsh, I resisted all temptations to turn aside, and soon reached Great Wakering, a long, straggling, characteristic Essex village. 'A Devonshire village,' says the Rev. S. Baring-Gould, 'does not contrast favourably with those in Essex . . . where brick or timber and plaster are the materials used, and where the roofs are tiled.' Cottages of timber—tarred, whitewashed, or painted—caught my eye frequently as I passed through the village from west to east, from the meeting-house of the Peculiar People to the ancient parish church. Indeed, one third of the dwellings are of wood; and some are such tiny, old, amorphous structures that I marvel they stand from year to year. Great Wakering folk are themselves long-lived. Many time-worn, weather-beaten men and women may be seen standing at their low doorways, looking out upon the village, which is to them the world, or pottering down the street with feeble steps. At the hour of Morning Service I strolled round their churchyard, having been warned that the church itself, although dating from Norman times, can boast little of

interest. Its font, however, is Norman, and an ancient chamber is still above the porch. Some quaintly-worded verses are upon headstones here; three which I copied may prove of interest and be longer preserved on the printed page than over the usually neglected grave:

'Farewell vain world, I have had enough of thee,
And now am careless what thou saist of me,
Thy smiles I court not nor thy frowns I fear
My cares are past my head is quiet here;
What faults you have seen in me take care to shun
And look at home, enough is to be done.'

'My life was short for death soon come,
And took me to a better home,
So warning take ye passers by,
You may be strong, so once was I,
But when death his dart doth strike
It is to strong and weak alike.'

'My time was come, my glass was run,
A sudden death I could not shun
But I from earth must go,
Be satesfied dear friends therefore
And mourn and weep for me no more
For God would have it so.'

Spelling and diction we probably owe to the united efforts of the local stonemason—an Essex Old Mortality—and the Wakering bard; they are here carefully transcribed from the originals.

The sun had partially dispelled the mists when I pursued my way down Tinker's Lane and presently reached Wakering Marsh. The tide was at its uttermost ebb, as I knew before reaching the sea-wall opposite Maplin Sands, for the air smelt keenly of the sea, ever most pungent when the tide is out. Here the vicinity of the sea-wall is known as Wakering Steps; and from the immediate foreshore 'brooms' are placed 30 yards apart, to mark the track across the sands to Foulness Island. Near the wall stands a magazine; a notice warned me not to touch any projectile upon the beach, as it might explode! I wished to watch the birds, so, keeping the lee side of the wall, I stumbled over the slippery hummocks and coarse marsh herbage, and, reaching a shallow, brackish stream, followed its course as far as to the coastguard look-out. To this stream herons come to catch small eels; by peering closely into the water I saw their footprints clearly enough, and marked how they had fished systematically, crossing and recrossing from bank to bank. I was sorry to learn afterwards that these fine birds now visit the neighbourhood comparatively seldom. No doubt they have scant relish for the sound of the guns,

that thunder constantly from Sheppey Isle or Shoeburyness and elicit echoes from the whole archipelago—from Havengore and Potton Isles, from New England and Foulness. Their footprints in the bed of the stream reminded me of those footprints of bird and beast preserved to us from primeval eons. It may be that in future ages geologists will dig among the drift and strata lying where this stream now runs, and on discovering these toe-marks in the aqueous rock will ponder the structure of those strange wading birds that haunted Wakering Marsh so long ago!

Whilst indulging such conjectures I saw a man coming towards me. He wore a jersey and wading-boots, and carried a bag of winkles on his back. He was making for his small fishing-smack, now stranded on the ooze in Havengore Creek. As becomes a wanderer, I passed him the time o' day; I found him communicative, and we were soon fast friends. I followed him to his boat, where he showed me about threescore of 'ox-birds' in a fishing-basket. 'Ox-bird' is another name for the dunlin, that prettily marked sandpiper so plentiful around our coasts. I once saw many thousands pass Southend Pier, flying closely

together, probably on their way to Leigh Marsh or Canvey Island. Here, among the creeks between the isles and over the Maplin Sands, they congregate in vast numbers; we saw many flocks 'pausing upon their *grayish* flutterings' as we chatted beside the boat. Among them were redshanks and sanderlings. At the turn of the tide the ox-birds pass up the creeks in countless hosts, flying so closely together that numbers of them are sometimes killed by a single discharge from a swivel-gun in a punt. That way the birds in the basket had met their death. The gun had been loaded with a half-pound charge of small shot, and the boat had been silently pushed into midstream. The dunlins came on as usual, flying low and in such close order that 208 were killed by one discharge. The gulls made a continual piping as we talked; flight after flight of dunlins came up the creek from the direction of Wakering Steps, and sometimes, as the shallow water was ruffled by the wind, we found it difficult to discern these erratic flutterers. Sometimes, too, they swerved suddenly, and showed a twinkle of white as they turned their breasts to the sun; then they dropped down upon the oozy shore and spread themselves abroad—an army of dark specks upon the mud.

Facing us was Havengore Island, a wilderness upon which I could discern no living thing except birds, so often in evidence where apparently no other creature lives or moves or has its being.

Inshore the wind sighed softly among the sedges, and larks flitted restlessly from place to place. In the west, heavy clouds were gathering ominously; already a few drops of rain pattered upon the ditches on the marsh. I looked for dirty weather, and, picking my way over the rank grass, seemed to encounter the spirit of desolation, with little before me saving a 'blank, appalling solitude of rain.' But the weather changes quickly on such spots as Wakering Marsh, and before I had passed the farm near the southern extremity of Potton Island the clouds had hurried seawards with the wind. Presently I came to a litter of barges, moored beside the brickfields. These barges bring rubbish from London to be burned here, and even such unpromising cargoes bring good-luck on occasion. Not long ago a man found a ring among the rubbish, which he sold for £14; a meerschaum pipe and case, similarly discovered, were valued at 30s. Here is an opportunity for the essayist, who might narrate the story of that meerschaum, even as Addison,

in the *Tatler*, recorded the 'Adventures of a Shilling.'

From the sea-wall, fronting Potton Island, three church-towers are visible: those of Great and Little Wakering and Barling. These churches were landmarks to the wayfarer centuries before a finger-post was erected in Essex. Indeed, we are told that churches were frequently built upon rising ground in order that they might be conspicuous. The country was then more thickly wooded, and the stranger would have hardly found the church had it lacked a tower. He sought it often. If destitute and lacking bread, of the priest he craved alms; if fleeing from justice, with the priest he sought shelter.

Centuries ago the south-east of Essex was so ill-drained, so frequently inundated, that it is not easy to understand how folk could live in or near this district. Norden boasted of the fruitfulness of the county, and likened it to Palestine, that flowed with milk and honey; but he added, 'I cannot commende the healthfulness of it,' and complained of 'lowe places about the creekes, which gave me a most cruell quarterne fever.' Only five years back the sea, rising unusually high, flooded this marsh; the wall was quickly

repaired, but I do not recommend the land eastwards from Tinker's Lane as suitable for building leases. It is wisest to follow the roadway to Wakering Steps, for ditches are plentiful, grass-hummocks afford but a sorry foothold, and it is not advisable to lie down in such pastures.

But, despite all drawbacks, I would not readily forego my rambles around what are vulgarly called 'outlandish parts.' He knows little of the Earth's features who seldom quits her highways. The poet exclaims :

> 'O, Solitude ! where are the charms
> That sages have seen in thy face ?'

But he wooed her as a bride himself ; moreover, he puts the question in the mouth of a castaway, whose opinion we may rule out of court. Those who doubt that it is pleasant to ramble from village to village—to be abroad while the day is yet young, and still abroad as it waxes and wanes —are hardly to be convinced of their error by mere eloquence, or Hazlitt, Thoreau, and Stevenson, might have convinced them long ago. To such I can only say that life is short, and that he has tasted only one half of its pleasures who knows not the larger air of solitary places, the

secret communings of the heart on starlit byways, the incommunicable charm of pathless woods.

Solitary my walk certainly was, as, skirting the brickfields and leaving Barling on my right, I rambled towards Little Wakering. Rooks, as usual, were clamorous and busy upon the ploughed fields ; a covey of partridges rose almost from my feet ; some lapwings circled over the meadow beside the church. From where the barges lay stranded upon the mud to Little Wakering Church I met no man, woman, nor child. This fact, which I attributed in part to the fickleness of the weather, was somewhat displeasing. It was a displeasure which I have felt elsewhere. I remember, in particular, that I once met not a single person when walking from Godalming to the Devil's Punch Bowl on Hindhead. I hold that a man may enter heartily into the pleasures of silent wanderings, and may appreciate joys which are ' born of the very sigh that silence heaves ' ; but, none the less, he may love the sight of a comely country lass, or of a toddling child, and may perhaps consider that, be the landscape never so charming, the presence of such an one may enhance its beauty. The truth of this is known to such artists as Anton Mauve, as the novice in art

may perceive by glancing at his pictures. Or look at William Davis's 'View near Hale'—an old house clad with creepers, a thatched cottage, a stretch of meadow-land with poplars in the midst, a pond and many geese. All is admirably disposed; but to me, at least, it is the child in the foreground that adds completeness to the whole.

III

SHOPLAND AND BARLING

On a gray morning in March I set out from Southend for a ramble in the neighbourhoods of Shopland and Barling. The tower of Prittlewell Church, with its four crocketed pinnacles, loomed large through the haze ; its eight bells rang out crisply on the morning air ; skylarks, as if encouraged by the fitful gleams of sunshine, sang continuously in the high heavens. Some folk would assure us that birds are as greatly influenced in spirit by their surroundings as mankind. I have loved and watched birds all my life, and greatly question this assertion. I know that the larks sing as blithely over the brickfields of Prittlewell or the mud-wastes of Wallasea as over the Sussex downs.

Turning to the right presently, I struck across the open fields, among the turnips, shepherd's-purse, and blue speedwell. Reaching a straggling hedgerow ablaze with gorse, I saw in the distance,

showing clearly above rick and roof, the bell-turret of Shopland Church. A pond, overhung by willows, was haunted by wrens; the dark green leaves of the cuckoo-pint glistened among the long grass in the ditch. Later in the year the spot will be a 'murmurous haunt of flies,' a meeting-place of midges, a pleasance where the dragon-fly

> 'tilts against the field,
> And down the listed sunbeam rides resplendent
> With steel—blue mail and shield.'

In Shopland Churchyard stands a mass of rough stone, surmounted by a cross. It is to the memory of Frederick D. A. Thackeray, 'eldest son of the Rev. Frederick Thackeray, M.A., Vicar of this parish.' He perished at sea, with all on board the *Dundas Castle*, in the autumn of 1867, and this monument was erected by some friends and companions.

An old church of Norman foundation, a farmhouse, half a dozen cottages—that is Shopland, the 'Scopeland' of Domesday. In 1723 it comprised four farmhouses, a vicarage, and a cottage, but 'no alehouse.' Many churches stand in spots so solitary that except on rare occasions very few of their seats are occupied; but they must

surely have known larger congregations formerly. A church would not have been erected at Shopland, for instance, unless more persons lived near by than at the present time. We must remember that although the population of England rapidly increases there are many villages and some towns which were formerly more populous than now. But there are two other reasons for the meagre congregation at many parish churches. In the good old days most persons went to church on the Sabbath; nowadays comparatively few do so, and of those few, roughly speaking, half are Dissenters. It is therefore small wonder that many of our old parish churches are little more than conspicuous landmarks; in some, despite the far-reaching effects of the Oxford Movement, there is often no Morning Service even on Sunday. Such was the case when I visited Shopland: I found the church door locked, so was unable to see the square, thirteenth-century font, or the brass effigy of Thomas Stapel, a fourteenth-century sergeant-at-arms. Wright, indeed, speaks of the brass as a thing of the past, but I gather that it still exists, much the worse for the wear and tear of five and a half centuries.

A weather-stained countryman was sitting in

the sunshine before his doorway. I passed him the time o' day, and we fell to gossiping whilst a robin sang softly near by. I learned that he, too, was an incorrigible saunterer, and had seen many counties. He was confident that no corner of Essex is more quiet than this, and that nothing ever happens at Shopland to vary the monotony of life. He seemed contented enough, and there was a touch of piety in his talk. To judge from appearances, he exemplified the Pauline dictum that godliness with contentment is great gain. He said there was nothing to be done in the neighbourhood except a little farming, and doubted whether any handicraft was pursued profitably. He thought the market-gardens 'over Wakering way' as good a property as a man could look for between Shopland and the sea, nor did I quarrel with him on the score of his opinions. He talked and I listened, and free access to my tobacco-pouch helped him materially with his part of the contract. When I pursued my way, I found the cottage gardens bright with polyanthus. Mrs. Milne Home says that in Suffolk this flower is called 'Jack behind the garden gate.' It certainly looks out upon the wayfarer with a bright, roguish eye, and doubtless it was a girl who first gave it this name.

The sun shone with almost summer warmth ; the silence was only broken by an occasional twitter in the hedge or the call of a distant gull. The time of the singing of birds was hardly come.

I came out into the road that leads from Sutton to Barling ere the sun had reached the zenith. For the time of year the weather was superb. The sky was clear, save that here and there, as Keats puts it in his 'Endymion,' 'a little cloud would move across the blue.' The country rises softly towards Barling ; the road winds and twists so continuously that it is difficult to keep one's bearings. On my left, shut out from view by crumpled fields, a fox-haunted, gorse-clad solitude sloped gently to the Broomhill River, and I knew that the soaring larks could overlook a stretch of marsh broken by gleaming creeks and dotted with brown-sailed craft. The daffodils made a brave show before almost every cottage ; tiny beds were edged with snow-on-the-mountain ; yellow jessamine, that bright harbinger of spring, covered the trellis-work or peeped at the lattice. Boys with sticks in their hands were searching the ditches diligently for roots such as can be dug up and sold from door to door. It is well known that, within a radius of thirty miles from London, whole districts

are almost depleted of primroses and violets, but London does not receive so large a proportion of these beautiful spoils as is often supposed. Great numbers are sold in every town. Wandering women and boys bring roots and blooms into Southend early in the morning, and I gather from personal observation that they find them in good demand. 'Tis a pity, to say the least, that lane and copse should be so persistently stripped of their chief adornments. Wild-flowers in gardens are seldom seen to such advantage as by the way-side, on the banks of the stream, or in the quiet woods; the primrose never appears more beautiful than when, as Goldsmith says, it 'peeps beneath the thorn.' On reaching Barling I saw a deep ditch that skirted a considerable part of the village; its banks were beautifully covered with primroses and ground-ivy, and I was glad to learn that here they are seldom plucked, for a tall hedge divides the ditch from the village street, and the ditch is private ground.

The village of Barling is on high ground. I stood a while before a pleasant homestead—so pleasant that I envied the presumptive happiness of its inhabitants. A stretch of greensward before the entrance is shaded by a weeping willow; the

house, flanked by evergreens on either side, is overshadowed by tall elms, where rooks make their nests. Old men, brown and hale, were loitering in the street, clad in their Sunday best of stout broadcloth, with wide flap pockets large enough to hold a small rabbit or a pottle of nuts. At the meeting of three ways is the village pond, once broader and deeper than now. I leaned upon the fence that rails it round, watching some moorhens steal furtively from bank to bank, and some wagtails wading in the shallower water; a bat, tempted abroad by the bright sunshine, was dodging around merrily, and was an object of interest to a Barling youth, evidently no mean proficient with a stone. He told me that moorhens abound in the neighbourhood of the pond, and that many broods were hatched last spring among the faggots stacked near the waterside. He repeated, as if proud of the fact, that he was born in Barling and had lived there all his life, but admitted that 'things be ollust quiet-like, and most ony toime you can go a moile a Sundays an' see nuthen nur nobody.' His speech was very broad; his mixed dialect was acquired while working as builder's assistant among men from other counties. He used a few, and only a few, of the words given by Mr. Miller

Christy as characteristic provincialisms of the Essex dialect.

From history we turned to legend. I was told how, many years ago, there lived near Barling a somewhat eccentric baker. He prided himself upon his professional skill: he could make and bake a loaf better than any man for miles around, and Barling folk were wont to say that he would be a baker for pleasure even if he came into a fortune. Now, this worthy man either committed some great crime or imagined he had done so—local tradition is not clear upon the point. His guilt, whether real or imaginary, preyed upon his mind so greatly that one evening he wandered out to a lonely spot and there hanged himself from a tree. It was a bad day for Barling when he did this, for his perturbed spirit found no rest, and the countryside was much troubled by his posthumous vagaries. Sometimes, on windy nights, persons who passed near that tree would hear his heels knock together as though his body still hung from the branch. Or, when the moon shone brightly, you had only to run round that tree a hundred times, and, lo! there was the baker at his work, kneading his dough energetically, with his back to the trunk, as plain as a pikestaff! My

friend at Barling had heard of a man who was determined to see this apparition, even if he died in the sequel. So one night the man went quietly to the fatal tree, and, in order, as he thought, to watch more thoroughly, went alone. It was dark when he reached the tree, but, nothing daunted, he commenced to run round it in the approved fashion. Ninety-nine times he went round, and then slipped and sprained his ankle. The accident was looked upon as a salutary judgment from above, for he had derided the local belief and it was right he should smart for his folly. The whole story is foolish enough ; but Southey would have loved it and turned it into a ballad.

Superstition is dying throughout England, but dying more slowly than is supposed. In almost any village you will find, on chatting with the older folk, that belief in apparitions still survives. 'Ghosties' are known to have appeared in most neighbourhoods; I think the belief in such is very real on the coast of Essex. Sailors are proverbially superstitious, and folk who live near the sea are hardly less so. The presence of powers for which they cannot account—the fury of the storm, the voices of the wind and of the sea—conduce to the strengthening of their belief in the supernatural.

Hence the innumerable ghost yarns on our coast, both east and west, sometimes, as in the story just repeated, marked by obviously foolish details. A trait common to many ghost stories is the notion that persons are likely to revisit the glimpses of the moon if they suffer a violent death. The spirit of a suicide or murdered man is more likely to walk abroad after death than the spirit of a man who dies from natural causes, and this belief is thought to have given rise to the custom of driving a stake through the corpse of the suicide.

The country around Barling is so wholly pleasant and habitable that it is difficult to realize how unwholesome it was before the marshes were systematically drained. True, Barling village is not on marshland, but it is very close to Wakering Marsh—quite close enough to have suffered from the fogs and mists which carried ague far and wide so long ago. Defoe, who journeyed through the Eastern Counties in 1722, did not fail to visit this part of Essex; and he tells a strange story which he heard touching the unhealthy climate. He records that in this 'damp part of the world' it was common enough to meet with a man who had had from five to fifteen wives; indeed, he

says that some had more, and he names Fobbing, Benfleet, Prittlewell, Wakering, and Great Stambridge, as places where the truth of this was known and 'easy to be inquired into.' The reason for this extraordinary conduct is what concerns us here. Defoe adds that a merry fellow, who had himself had about a score of wives, told him that the men of the marshes, being seasoned to the damp climate, took little harm from it, but that they went into the 'hilly country' for their wives. 'When they took the young lasses out of the wholesome and fresh air they were healthy, fresh and clear, and well; but when they came out of their native air into the marshes among the fogs and damp, there they presently changed their complexion, got an ague or two, and seldom held it above half a year, or a year at most.' One wife sacrificed, another was procured; and so the process went on *de novo*. Defoe is careful to state that his merry informer 'fibbed a little,' at least as concerned his own wives; but he assures us that the general statement is perfectly true. In those days the novelist had scarcely arisen in our land, or here had been a fine study in the tragedy of human life! The pity of it would fill many volumes. The toddling child in the upland

village, passing from girlhood to womanhood to be roughly wooed—as Rebow wooed Mehalah—by the farmer or fisher from the marsh, and taken to his lowland home to die, perhaps, ere she bore her first child, was a subject, as Shakespeare puts it in a far different connection, to 'make the angels weep.' Let us rejoice that the much-belauded good old days are past indeed, and that in many a farm in the Essex marshes we may meet bonny figures and winsome faces, and may return in safety to our own place without an ague or 'quarterne fever.'

I have said that Barling is close to Wakering Marsh. The marshy nature of the surrounding soil in olden days may be gathered from its history. We read that in 1253 a marsh owned by Rudulphus Cementarius was purchased by Henry de Cornwall, Dean of St. Paul's, for 10 marks. This marsh formed a part of the Manor of Barling. In 1322 a son of Simon de Barling came to an agreement with the authorities at St. Paul's whereby he and his tenants undertook to raise a wall to keep out the sea from the demesnes of the Dean and Chapter, in return for which they were to enjoy 'for ever' the profits of the fishing in the upper part of the

Broomhill River.* Were it not for the diligence of our forefathers, the neighbourhood eastwards from Barling would to-day be little better than a swamp. Like the Dutchmen in Goldsmith's incomparable poem, they were sedulous to stop the coming tide. By dint of continued labour, and sometimes by the exercise of much ingenuity, they drained the marshes and stayed the progress of the sea; and their descendants enjoyed the fruits of their labours.

* Wright's 'History and Topography of the County of Essex' (London, 1836), vol. ii., p. 618.

IV

ROCHFORD AND STAMBRIDGE

The little town of Rochford, the reputed birth-place of Anne Boleyn, stands at the head of the river Roche or Roach, and gives its name to a hundred of the county of Essex. It is not easy either to refute or substantiate the local belief, fondly cherished, as to the unfortunate Queen. Whether born at Rochford or not, she figures frequently in the annals and legends of Essex. Ramblers whose road led them to East Horndon have been shown, in the ruined church on a knoll hard by, an altar-tomb believed to hold the ashes of the heart of Anne Boleyn. In Norfolk, as Mr. Dutt tells us in his charming book on East Anglia, the belief was long cherished that her body was secretly removed from the Tower of London and conveyed to the grand old church at Salle; in Essex it was as tenaciously held that the heart—or, as some affirm, the head—was brought to East Horndon. It is at least certain that

Rochford Hall belonged to the Boleyns, and probably enough Anne passed many days in its neighbourhood. Moreover, readers may remember that among those persons arrested in 1536, in connection with the trial of Anne, was her brother, George Boleyn, Viscount Rochford. Both were beheaded, and thousands have read their names on the mural brass in the Church of St. Peter ad Vincula in the Tower.

The life, trial and death of Anne Boleyn form an obscure chapter in English History. I do not purpose to investigate it. It was midwinter when I first saw Rochford Hall, 'under the opening eyelids of the dawn,' from the greensward which stretches westwards from the parish church of St. Andrew. Jackdaws chattered among the high elms and quarrelled upon the angle-turret of the brick tower as I passed the lich-gate and entered the churchyard. The spot commands a good view of the Hall, a building of no great size, faced with stucco. One feature alone, the north-east octagonal turret, is suggestive of the days of Anne Boleyn. Between the churchyard and the Hall stand a few chestnuts ; on the north the road is shaded by an avenue, planted by Sir James Tilney. Under the shadow of the church-tower stands a

headstone to the memory of one Jacob Harvey, who died in 1821. The inscription on it arrested my attention :

> 'Benificence diffusive is the mason's plan,
> And Truth and Charity complete the man ;
> If these are principles deserving fame,
> Let masons then enjoy the praise they claim.'

The words, quaint and obscure, will bear a local application. Anne Boleyn probably knew the sweets of 'benificence diffusive' so long as her royal lord and husband loved her, or thought he did, but she suffered only too soon through lack of Truth and Christian Charity.

Some time during the reign of Henry III. market rights were granted to one Guy de Rochford, the leading man among those who dwelt near the ford across the Roche. The town grew and flourished, as towns are apt to do, and became the centre of a district famous for its corn. It nurtured a strange custom which deserves a passing word. Several centuries have elapsed since the men of Rochford first held their 'Whispering Court' on a Wednesday in Michaelmas. Very early in the morning, sometimes by torchlight, folk would assemble on King's Hill, hard by the town. The Court was opened by the

Steward of the Manor, in a scarcely audible whisper ; in a whisper its business was transacted ; the 'minutes' were meanwhile duly entered with a piece of coal or charcoal ! A modified form of this good old custom is still kept up, or was quite recently.*

'Most old towns,' writes Mr. Andrew Lang, 'are like palimpsests, parchments which have been scrawled over again and again, by their successive owners.' To read the sentence is to perceive its truth—a truth forcibly brought to mind during an hour's stroll through any town, although its closest application lies in the streets of Oxford or Canterbury, Winchester or St. Albans. Successive generations have left their impress clearly enough upon Rochford, where all styles of cottage and villa architecture, old and new, unsightly and

* 'Very many years ago, the Lord of the Manor, after an absence from his estate, was returning home by night. Passing over King's Hill, he accidentally heard some of his discontented tenantry plotting his assassination, and, thus warned, he reached home by an unexpected route. From that time forth he enacted that the tenants on his estate should assemble every year exactly at the same time to do him homage around a post which he erected on the precise spot where the plotters met. The present post was erected in 1867 ; it is an exact counterpart of the original post.' —Mr. E. Protheroe, in the *Windsor Magazine*, vol. xix.

picturesque, are met together. Some would make a pretty enough picture, though drawn by the pencil of a mere novice ; others could hardly be rendered charming by the hand of Mr. Herbert Railton or Mr. Edmund H. New. Here, on the outskirts of the town, are heavily-thatched houses built largely of timber, and surmounted by chimney-stacks of erratic configuration—houses which may have sheltered peasant folk through all those sixty years when George the Third was King. Here, in one of the main thoroughfares, stands a row of houses somewhat more commodious, but showing curiously fashioned dormer-windows which, singularly enough, are larger than those below them. No two of these windows lean at similar angles ; some peer forward so far that they threaten to fall upon their faces in the street, others lean back in a manner which must sadly try the strength of the sloping roof. Elsewhere stand flat-faced houses, as like to one another as the beauties which look down from the canvases of some Court painters ; their windows are alike in size and shape ; their whited steps and knockers of polished brass betoken that they shelter the comparatively well-to-do. Many such houses date from the early days of our own sires;

but others are as old as the first years of last century. They are a type of house perhaps more widely distributed over England than any other type saving the thatched cottage; but they are seldom, to my thinking, pleasing to the eye. They were often, and are still, the houses of small country practitioners, or of prosperous tradesmen who own a shop somewhere round the corner in the High Street. Grant Allen might have thought of these houses as typical residences of the English Philistine. Whoever possesses the complete Poetical Works of Robert Southey, in one large octavo, may see on the title-page an engraving of 'Mr. Southey's Residence in Keswick,' an excellent example of this particular architecture.

Presently, pursuing my search for the picturesque, I came to such a spot as may be found in the neighbourhood of many English towns. Typical rather than curious, it showed no unusual feature, but, when closely considered, its *ensemble* was very pleasing to the eye. In the immediate foreground lay a small pond, shaded by several elms; to the right, visible between the elms, stood some hayricks and a heavily-thatched barn, above the top of which the cowl of a malting-house

showed oddly—an incongruous detail. To the left, the winding street stretched southwards; a postman trudged steadily towards the inn near the pond, a retriever at his heels. Overhead, the blue sky was unusually clear for the season and time of day; everywhere was the silence of early morning. I will own that my thoughts were not tinged with poetry meet for the occasion. On the contrary, I was thinking of early hours passed, long ago, in that wilderness of civilization and street-calls, that 'beflagged and Macadamized, man-made solitude'—London.

I rambled through more solitary country later in the day with a friend for company. Striking the north bank of the Roche, we came to Stambridge Mills, where a broad expanse of water fringed with grass and rush awoke lively memories of days spent in fishing from a punt for bream and jack. Such memories, however, were irrelevant; I believe no jack inhabit the brackish waters of the Roche. The mills are up-to-date structures of brick; we did not look for the proverbial jolly miller, nor expect to see his pretty daughter eye us archly from her window, over the 'long, green box of mignonette.' Two barges lay beside the quay, the *Surprise* and the *James and Harriet;* but

the bargees were not eager to swop yarns, having figuratively—and perhaps actually—other fish to fry below deck. I am not sure, by-the-by, that such bargees as I have met were in love with their mode of life. Any one of them would probably have evinced much astonishment had I read to him the words of Stevenson: 'I am sure I would rather be a bargee than occupy any position under heaven that required attendance at an office. There are few callings, I should say, where a man gives up less of his liberty in return for regular meals; . . . so far as I can make out, time stands as nearly still with him as is compatible with the return of bedtime or the dinner-hour. It is not easy to see why a bargee should ever die.'

Close to Stambridge Mills lie the villages of Great and Little Stambridge. Our way to Great Stambridge led us past the Church of St. Mary and All Saints, which stands at some distance from the village. On the right-hand side of the ivy-clad doorway in the tower a small, arched recess, such as might formerly have held an image, now frames a mosaic of small stones, so arranged as to set forth this inscription:

THIS
CHURCH
R · S · O · E ·
1881

The R · S · O · E · stands, I suppose, for 'restored.' It was the Greek cross that caught my eye, the ecclesiastical symbol that confronts us everywhere in England. It tops the church; it stands upon the altar; it is figured on the covers of our Prayer-Books and upon our hot-cross-buns on Good Friday. It is worn upon neck-chain or girdle, just as the likeness of the sacred scarab beetle, as charm or amulet, is still worn in Egypt. And the comparison is sufficiently pertinent, for the Rev. W. J. Loftie has told us that the scarab has been engraved with Christian symbols — crosses and crucifixes. Seen in this quiet spot, conspicuous upon the church wall, it serves at least to remind one of the longevity of fetishism. Helena, to whom we owe the cult of the cross, is said to have been born at Colchester, in this county; an old, old story ascribes to her the discovery of the cross upon which Christ suffered, and of which innumerable portions are treasured in

cathedrals and churches throughout Europe. It will be neglected by-and-by, as other idols are neglected. Here, for instance, in this very churchyard, are graves mantled with sphagnum moss, with rank grass at the bases of their headstones. Such stones were once venerated. Just as, in this twentieth century, the votaries of superstition cense the grave and sprinkle it with 'holy water,' so, in a bygone age, they would have anointed and revered the headstone. The cross is now the universal fetish of ecclesiasticism (I do not say of Christianity); one of its forerunners was the standing-stone, perhaps the oldest idol in the world. And the stone of the dead is to-day sacred in lands where the cross is yet unknown. It is largely a question of geography.

Nor is this veneration of a mere symbol confined to those in authority. Poor peasant folk, especially women, are often unable to pay for the erection of a stone monument to the memory of their loved ones. So they do what they can: they fashion a rude cross of wood, sometimes two bare laths tied one over the other at right angles, and this witness to their faith is placed at the head of the grave, as may be seen in many a churchyard. I should, I hope, be loath to make light of this

primitive piety : the memorial is often enough the best such folk can furnish, and may indeed be likened to that ointment of spikenard, very precious, which Mary lavished upon the feet of Christ.

For one half of the story of any village we go to the parish church, for the other half to the oldest inn. We found an inn of the good old sort at Great Stambridge, an inn where the old order of things still largely obtains, where you meet persons whose talk is interesting and may enjoy that

> 'honest, offer'd courtesy,
> Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds
> With smoaky rafters, than in tap'stry halls
> And courts of princes.'

In one corner of the cosy parlour stood a fine grandfather's clock, made by 'Wm. Smith, London' ; on the wall opposite hung a mezzotint of the old Market House, Rochford, pulled down in 1861 ; in this building was stored wool of fine quality, much of which was bought by dealers from Chelmsford. Close by was an old print of Horatio Nelson, who assuredly disputes with Alfred the right to be called 'England's darling' ; a large view of the Crystal Palace, with an

amazing concourse of folk in the foreground ; and a hooded merganser, shot some years ago at Hampton Barns near by. The host was proud of his bird, and, while talking of wild-fowl, told us that in severe weather he had seen ' they black geese ' fly over the village in flocks which no man could number—flocks ' most fower-mile square.' He told us, too, how merry the villagers waxed in the days of the toy fair, and how boats came yearly from Whitstable to fetch oysters from the many creeks in this part of Essex, sometimes loading seventy tons in one bottom. He remembered how a woman who had dealings with the devil was seen walking in the lane with her head under her arm, and how, one evening, she lifted Bill Cooper with one hand from the wall where he was sitting, and dropped him in the ditch some distance off. Moreover, not so long afterwards, a most worthy resident was greatly perturbed on several successive nights, for as he lay awake he heard the chairs shake violently, and doubted not that it was the work of Satan. Mine host was firmly convinced that the devil had long quitted the neighbourhood, but perhaps he had not broached the subject to the local clergy or Dissenting ministers.

The hostess was writing a letter in a corner of the room, but she had an ear for our talk, and came to the rescue readily when her good man flagged. Her remarks, trivial enough for the most part, were at times uttered with a touch of pathos, and might easily have been turned into verse by such a poet as Crabbe. She waxed indignant over the rowdy, shameless conduct of those trippers who periodically make a noisy progress in brakes through this quiet marsh-country. Many of them, I am sorry to relate, have imperfect ideas touching the distinction between *meum* and *tuum*, and after much horse-play in the village, 'filling the air with barbarous dissonance,' they seek the nearest inn, to drink and pilfer. Only last year several 'lewd fellows of the baser sort' came to Great Stambridge, and were not ashamed to steal, among other things, a shawl of curious workmanship, long treasured by the good wife as a specimen of her early handicraft. Perhaps her greenest memories were of visits to Foulness Island: she remembered many a walk across bleak, sea-girt solitudes, and down to the shore to fetch fish from the boats or from the 'kettles,' and knew many an incident in the life of the 'King of the Island,' who lived at Quay Farm. Her talk smacked

largely of the countryside, of live-stock, of the weather, of flowers and fruits. She shared, though she knew it not, in that love of the external world which inspired the utterances of Cynewulf so long ago :

Fair is the field,
Full happy and glad,
Filled with the sweetest
Scented flowers.
Unique is that island,

* * * *

Winsome its woods,
And its fair green wolds,
Roomy with reaches.

Not far from this village, near Barton Creek, stands Barton or Breton Hall, a fine old manor-house, once the home of Richard Brito, one of the notorious knights who murdered Thomas à Becket.

Before quitting Great Stambridge we asked our way to Foulness Island, and were told that the journey thither has its dangers, as the Rector of Foulness warned a friend in a published letter some time ago. It appears that one evening he walked from Shoeburyness as the rain fell fast; consequently he was very wet when he reached Wakering Steps and prepared to walk barefooted

over the mud to the 'brooms,' and thence across the sands to the saltings—a perilous journey in the gathering gloom, laden as he was with a number of books. Presently darkness came down in earnest; the Rector lost his bearings, and, as some of the brooms were missing, his difficulties may be imagined. Moreover, the tide was rising, and would soon cover the whole scene. Fortunately, he reached land without mishap, and, although drenched to the skin, was thankful to have escaped from what was, figuratively speaking, a very tight corner. I hope he saved his books.

There is another way of approach—not to say *road*—to Foulness Island. By crossing Cricksey Ferry, near Paglesham, you reach Burnham-on-Crouch, and, walking eastwards on the sea-wall, presently sight another ferry, and may cross to Foulness in comparative safety. But we had still some daylight left for our present excursion, so we rambled eastwards, and keeping the Roche on our right, with the tower of Barling Church as a conspicuous landmark, we presently reached Paglesham. Finding nothing unusual in the neighbourhood of the church, we turned to the north-west and roamed across the marsh towards Canewdon. But winter is no favourable time for

marsh rambles; it became very cold as the afternoon waned, and we thought it prudent to again seek shelter within doors. The few snowflakes that fell as we talked over our tea in the village of Canewdon were only sufficient to remind us how eccentric in behaviour old Winter has recently become. According to records, printed and oral, our forefathers were snowed up more often than we. Travelling in Essex at Yuletide was no easy matter. Snow impeded the awkward, rolling family coach, made its wheels heavy as the wheels of Pharaoh's chariots, and kept folk waiting for their Christmas dinner. The daily battle with snowballs made boys late for school; the slide on the village pond was responsible for their late arrival in church with very red faces. In these degenerate days it is an open question whether snow will fall at Christmas. The dame who sits aloft has few geese to pluck, or she hoards their feathers instead of scattering them over the parish as in the good old days. Well, there are other pastimes besides watching the snow fall. We may still exchange friendly glances across the walnuts and the wine, and for those who cannot 'read Plato with their feet in the fender,' the novelist—God bless him—is ever with us. Hope's enchanted cigarettes, as

Mr. Lang calls them, may be smoked despite the cold rain that falls almost uninterruptedly, and may call up visions as consolatory as any which they inspire by stream or loch, when the trout refuse to rise.

At Canewdon I heard that a full-grown seal, measuring 4 feet and weighing 80 pounds, had just been shot in the Crouch at North Fambridge. I was told, too, that several of these animals have been shot in the same river during the past few years, but that, owing to their habit of sinking when struck, the skins have seldom been obtained. They come up the river with the tide, to capture bass.

Weever, in his 'Monuments,' remarks that Canewdon owes its name to Canute, a supposition which he probably derived from the Saxon Chronicle. Undoubtedly both Canute and his father, Sweyn, were much in the neighbourhood; but the precise derivation of 'Canewdon' will perhaps never be ascertained beyond dispute. Traces of the Roman occupation are more tangible. The Rev. George Wheatley, sometime curate of St. Nicholas, Canewdon, and a 'learned parson,' wrote a brief account of the discovery of Roman remains near the village. He records that in 1712 a

dozen urns were found in a field near the Hall, and a larger number during the following year; but only two were preserved entire. The urns differed in size, shape, and ornamentation, and were mostly full of earth, but one contained some bones. Several others were diseovered subsequently, on a stratum of gravel near the surface of the ground, by a Rector of Danbury.

V

FOULNESS ISLAND

THE small island of Foulness, a little larger than Canvey Island, lies on the south-east coast of Essex. You have it on your port side as you sail up the Crouch towards Burnham; New England, Potton, and Havengore Isles lie between its south-western extremity and the mainland; seawards stretch the Foulness and Maplin Sands, where you may wander on foot at low-water. These sands, however, are no good ground upon which to test the goodwill of Providence. The returning tide may overtake and drown you; close inshore you may walk into deep black mud and perish; the sea-wall and even the nearest farmhouse may seem almost at hand, but your voice will carry a short distance if a stiff nor'-wester should hurry seawards at the moment of your distress. It is best to keep near the brooms, which, as the tide ebbs, gradually lift their heads and appear as a line of black dots, some six miles long, stretching from Wakering Stairs, or

Steps, to Fisherman's Head on the north-east promontory of Foulness, not far from the Bull Beacon. Of the brooms there are nearly 400; they are—as I have mentioned—placed 30 yards apart, and are sunk 2 feet into the sand. Every year they are renewed; but it is necessary to repair many of them at shorter intervals. The Foulness postman drives his pony-cart over this strange route daily during favourable seasons; but in hard winter, when the brackish creeks of the Essex archipelago freeze, masses of ice are occasionally washed towards the broom-track as the tide ebbs. At such times, as I was told on the island, it is impossible to drive, and the postman has to scramble along on foot over miniature floe and pack. A few years ago about 700 persons lived on Foulness, but the population is now much smaller, and the average mail, we may suppose, is not heavy.

The spectator who stands on the sea-wall at Wakering Steps, looking before him across the Maplin Sands towards the Blacktail Beacon, and southwards to Shoeburyness and the Isle of Sheppey, overlooks the entire mouth of the Thames. Across that expanse of water great steamers plough their way to other lands than ours; big barges wallow in the rolling sea, and it is to-day, as so

many centuries ago, dotted with fishing-smacks and smaller craft. Defoe penned a very interesting paragraph concerning this neighbourhood. After referring to Barking as a large market-town chiefly inhabited by fishermen, and mentioning the new plan to bring live fish from the east coasts of Britain to London in sloops called fishpools, he proceeds to speak of the Essex seaboard. 'On the shore beginning a little below Candy Island, or rather below Leigh Road, there lies a great shoal or sand called the Black Tail, which runs out near three leagues into the sea due east; at the end of it stands a pole or mast, set up by the Trinity House men of London, whose business is to lay buoys and set up sea-marks for the direction of the sailors; this is called Shoe Beacon, from the point of land where this sand begins, which is called Shoeburyness, and that from the town of Shoebury, which stands by it. From this sand, and on the edge of Shoebury, before it, or south-west of it, all along to the mouth of Colchester water, the shore is full of shoals and sands, with some deep channels between; all which are so full of fish, that not only the Barking fishing-smacks come hither to fish, but the whole shore is full of small fisher-boats in very great

numbers, belonging to the villages and towns on the coast, who come in every tide with what they take; and selling the smaller fish in the country, send the best and largest away upon horses, which go night and day to London market.' As regards these 'buoys and sea-marks' hereabouts, I may mention that the Nore, nearly due south from Wakering Steps, was formerly called the 'Ower' and sometimes the 'Mower'; the Whittaker Beacon, at the north-east point of Foulness Sands, was set up in 1663; the Whittaker Sand was formerly called the 'Wheat Acre'; still farther north-east, the Sledway Channel, near Gunfleet Sand, was called the Sladeway or Gunway.*

It was bitterly cold when we three, very early in the morning, struck across Wakering Marsh for the coastguard look-out on Havengore Creek. Our destination was Foulness Island; our shortest road thither lay across the marsh to Wakering Steps; but remembering that discretion is the better part of valour we decided to consult the coastguard man as to time and tide. The tide, we found, would serve; the day, despite the cold wind, promised well; so we pursued our way in

* *Vide* 'Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,' New Series, vol. xvi., p. 85.

high spirits along the sea-wall to the Steps. A few folk, whom we took for cockle-gatherers, strayed hither and thither in the wake of the retiring tide; the gulls wailed plaintively in the offing; beyond, several large vessels loomed indistinctly in the haze. Two of us elected to do the journey barefooted; the third, 'in point of fact, the present humble scribe,' decided to retain his brown walking-boots, knowing that sea-water does little harm, saving to the boots themselves. I was justified in the sequel. A trudge of some eleven miles over wet, yielding sands and through running streamlets gave my companions a rough experience of aching soles and insteps. I felt no inconvenience whatever, for my boots soon dried by the action of sun and wind. To all who think of crossing on foot to Foulness I would say, 'Walk in brown boots, and, if there is a promise of warm sunshine, keep them on.'

The brooms sweep round to the left from Wakering Steps; thence our course lay straight before us to Eastwick Head, a distance of about five miles over the 'ribbed sea-sand.' About a mile from Wakering we exchanged a cheery greeting with the postman, whose cart appeared to travel easily enough over that sandy causeway.

We met but one other vehicle, a large farm waggon, which lumbered along heavily. Mr. R. A. Beckett, who once reached the Steps just before dusk, saw 'a procession of market-carts rapidly driven across the sands, amid much splashing, through water about a foot deep.' The sands were comparatively firm and dry during our journey; but we had to pass through many running channels, and the water was over our ankles as we crossed the mouth of Havengore Creek and waded in earnest through the Swashway—a deep channel which runs from the southern extremity of Foulness towards the Black Tail Beacon, dividing the Maplin from the Foulness Sands. A thousand tiny pools glittered in the morning sun. At times we made merry progress on excellent footing; but presently a foot would sink into a deep hole, and it was necessary to reconnoitre. I remembered the words of Cowper:

> 'Slee, sla, slud;
> Stuck in the mud;
> Oh, it is pretty to wade through a flood!'

We had chosen our time carefully, or we might have feared a flood indeed. Is it necessary to advise all who intend crossing the sands to Foulness to go by their watch and tide-table rather

than by appearances? The sands lie at so uniform a level for many a hundred yards from the sea-wall that when once the returning tide has flushed their farther margin they are speedily covered; at the ebb, they are as speedily laid bare; and sometimes, when a strong wind is accompanied by hot sunshine, the sand along the whole track becomes so dry between tide and tide that it is blown hither and thither in clouds, much to the discomfort of those bold cyclists, of either sex, who have been known to steer their way safely from Wakering to Fisherman's Head.

Far down the Foulness Sands are the Fish Kettles, of which we had heard when chatting at Great Stambridge some weeks before. The Kettles consist of fish-nets set in the form of a V, with their apex pointing seawards. At flood-tide many fish find their way within these nets, from which they cannot escape at low-water. The 'take,' we were told, consists largely of flounders, plaice, and other flat fish.

The island, I must admit, affords a dreary prospect as you approach it from the sea. The foreshore is backed by the long brown line of the sea-wall, above which little can be seen against the sky saving the telegraph-posts and, here and there,

the roof of a farm building or the top of a rick. From the wall itself the prospect is more pleasing ; the expanse of pasture is well sprinkled with farm-sheds and cottages, and you may notice a dilapidated windmill or the tapering spire of St. Mary's Church. The island soil, according to Wright's 'History of Essex,' was formerly the richest in the county, and the natives acknowledge that their sires and grandsires had little to bemoan on the score of pastoral prosperity. The sea-wall, in anything like its present form, is comparatively modern, and Wright records that in his day (1836) regular steps of ascending planes could be traced from the first embankments to the level of the saltings, which were still open to the sea. He states that every spring-tide added by its action to the height of these natural ridges by the deposit of sediment, and thus, he adds, 'without the industry of man, will the sea be made to retire further from the cultivated enclosures.' Nature, as Milton says, taught Art : the industry of man has been utilized here as elsewhere, and the entire length of the wall is faced and fortified by a layer of stones.

We touched *terra firma*—for the sands can hardly be so called—at Eastwick Head. Here,

with no great effort of the imagination, we might suppose ourselves at the world's end; for the island coast rounds sharply at Foulness Point, and the North Sea stretches onwards, league beyond league, to the uttermost horizon. As we looked down upon that waste of waters hardly a sail broke the monotone of blue; only, close to the edge of the turning tide, a barge was apparently heading for the Blackwater and Maldon Quay. We sat upon the slope of the sea-wall to enjoy awhile the luxury of rest, the fragrance of tobacco, the genial sunshine, the crisp, untainted air, the songs of soaring larks. In truth, we had walked out of Southend at six by the clock, and had journeyed thus far almost without pause, so were glad of such sweet respite, and made the most of it.

At Eastwick Head one is forcibly reminded of Mr. Percy Lindley's words in 'New Holidays in Essex': 'Approaching Foulness, and in cruising along the estuary, one may fancy one's self in Holland. There are the same dykes or sea-walls with the land behind them lower than the water; the same soft gray skies; the same green pastures; the same odd effects from the tops of trees and the roofs of houses peeping above the dykes

and apparently just on a level with the river; the same bright-coloured, brown-sailed barges, although of a somewhat different build; and the same herons standing on one leg and gravely eyeing the quiet prospect around them.' We did not see the herons—thanks to those 'sportsmen' who have so industriously thinned the ranks of this handsome bird.

Presently we pulled ourselves together and struck for the village; and learning from a ploughman that we might choose between two inns, we comforted one another with the promise of lunch. We plodded across wide pastures dotted with sheep, and over plank-spanned dykes, dry and featureless. These dykes were formerly kept clean, and the sea flooded them from the inlets placed low in the wall. In those days the dykes literally swarmed with eels—a fact well known to the herons. Wright speaks of the 'salt-water stews' on this island, filled with various sorts of fish. They were, he says, well constructed, and answered their purpose completely. He tells us that the fish were caught in weirs on the sands, which extended for miles down the coast, and were dragged with small nets.

The sight of three strange men caused no small

stir among the cottage folk, and more than one wee islander was held up at the window or in the open doorway to watch us pass. An old man, planting potatoes in his garden patch, gave us a cheery welcome. But neither the King's Head nor the Dragon hove in sight, and only when we found ourselves before a window of tiny panes, which gave light to one who was busy with his pipe, newspaper and beer, did we guess that we had found an inn. It might almost have been the island lock-up. I remembered Mr. Lang's advice to those anglers who would fain take trout from unfrequented burns. 'When, O Stranger, thou hast reached a burn where the shepherd asks thee for the newspaper wrapped round thy sandwiches, that he may read the news, then erect an altar to Priapus, god of fishermen, and begin to angle boldly.' For here, surely, I might hope to meet some unsophisticated rustic, some man whose only wisdom is the wisdom of the wayside, some veteran whose world is the Essex archipelago. Nor was I disappointed. Hardly had we grouped ourselves around the fire, when we were joined by two ramblers who had crossed by the ferry from Burnham ; and then the door opened slowly and there entered a broad-shouldered Essex patriarch.

Father Time had laid his hand heavily upon him, and he stooped painfully under the burden of his years; but his speech was cheerful, with a touch of that dry humour which is at all times wholly irresistible. He lives, I will answer for it, in Thanksgiving Street.

Old Charlie was deeply versed in local lore. His memory went back to days when the islanders, like other folk, were more prosperous. Foulness, its neighbouring isles, and the adjacent mainland, have been described as 'Holland in miniature,' and Charlie could remember it as a land of dykes and windmills. The windmills (there is, I think, only one on the island itself) are now mostly dismantled, and stand like stranded wrecks, sorry mementoes of more merry days when their sails went round on many a hill-top. Nor was he ignorant of the smuggling days; for he knew many a story, at least from first-hand hearsay, of things that fell out when the inns about these creeks and islands drew most of their stores from men who loved darkness rather than light. But his talk to-day was mostly of exploits with the gun; and I listened to the apotheosis of the fowling-piece, which did such astonishing execution 'before they two-barrel things was dreamt on.'

Charlie waxed warm in argument presently; for the man who sat near the window as we entered could remember how, with a double-barrelled gun, he had on one occasion winged five wild-ducks out of seven. 'I'll warrant,' said Charlie, 'I fetch down more birds with one barrel than you would with two.' He told us how, many years ago, he had been out with another in a punt. They surprised an enormous congregation of black geese; the punt-gun was well charged with shot, which wrought awful havoc among the excited hosts. 'Six score' birds were picked up after one discharge, and were sold for fifteen pence apiece. To many, perhaps, this is a hard saying; but I have taller stories to tell in my next chapter.

We found further entertainment when we sought the island church. The grave-digger was busy in God's-acre, but he rested from his labours in order to act as guide. The present stone structure dates from 1850; in the tower on its south side hangs one bell, dated 1710. We saw no memorials in the church, nor any feature of unusual interest. But in the graveyard we were shown several large horizontal slabs, to the memory of former Rectors; these slabs were in the aisle of the old, weather-board building which was

the sanctuary of the islanders before the erection of the present church. They form, indeed, the sole remaining link with the old building ; for they mark its site, and the statement that the church was 'rebuilt in 1850' is thus misleading, for it stands on other though neighbouring ground. The oldest headstone in the churchyard bears the date 1698 ; this hardly takes us back so far as the register, which dates, I believe, from 1695. We found our guide much interested in the ritualistic controversy, and astonished because it had recently been deemed necessary to provide a lectern for the parson's use. There had been a pulpit in the church as long as he could remember, where the parson might read or speak, and what need was there for a lectern—what need for innovations of any sort? All that nonsense, too, about turning to the East! Why, what did it all come from? We all know, of course, that when the Children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness they paused, from time to time, to look eastwards ; but why need we do things because those Bible people did them? We were told that Foulness Church was quite full on Easter Sunday, and that even on ordinary days persons came here to worship from the farther parts of the island. The

notice-board in the porch bears the word 'Fowlness,' which is doubtless the correct spelling if the island, as is often asserted, owes its name to the multitudes of wild-fowl which visited it in olden days.

The return to Wakering Steps proved a sterner task than we anticipated. On reaching the sea-wall we found the tide only beginning to ebb, and knew that we must wait for a couple of hours before the sands would afford any secure foothold. So we walked along the wall to Asplin's Head, a good distance south from the spot where we had landed, and by so much the nearer to our desired haven. The afternoon was still young, and the westering sun shone intermittingly between wisps of white cloud. But the wind came to us coldly from the direction of Wallasea Island; so we clambered down to the water's edge, thus keeping the lee side of the wall. We could make no start before the brooms stood out well above the wash of the tide; so we picked our way to and fro among the channels which rippled and swirled among the litter of stones on the foreshore. I have whiled away intervals to meaner music and among less romantic surroundings.

At length a fringe of foam showed, as we

thought, that the tide line was already far enough down the Foulness Sands to suit our purpose, and we were soon retracing our steps in the track of the brooms. The more hurry the less haste. When we reached the Swashway, its waters in places were over a foot in depth, and swept past us like a river in spate. We had perforce to plunge in briskly, and wade some 20 yards with the water about our knees. To ramblers who cultivate a spirit of philosophic indifference, such incidents are but adventures by the way; they look forward to the enduring of greater dangers—to the fording of wider waters ere they cross the bar.

The waters that lay before us to the south as we returned to Wakering Steps once afforded a sorry spectacle, which John Evelyn was much grieved to witness: 'June 28, 1667 . . . thence to view not onely what mischiefe the Dutch had don, but how triumphantly their whole fleete lay within the very mouth of the Thames, all from the North fore-land, Margate, even to the buoy of the Nore —a dreadfull spectacle as ever Englishmen saw, and a dishonour never to be wiped off.'

VI

LEGENDS OF WILD-FOWLING

When I was at Havengore Creek, the sight of scores of dunlins lying in the bargee's basket suggested many memories, and I resolved to bring together in a separate chapter such anecdotes as I had heard or read of wild-fowl-shooting on the coast of Essex. The sport enjoyed among the creeks and saltings many years ago, or, rather, such stories of it as are still passed from man to man, savour almost of the miraculous. But, although I write of 'legends,' and although we must always allow for exaggeration, we know that wild-fowl formerly haunted the fens and marshes in innumerable multitudes. Only those who have watched the congregation of starlings, the migration of geese, the gregarious squadrons of dunlins, or similar phenomena of bird-life, have any adequate conception of the immense numbers of birds sometimes spread over a small area.

Wild-fowl-shooting on the coast of Essex, as in

many other districts, is largely a bygone sport. The wild-duck is diminishing in numbers year by year; the brent-goose flies in companies rather than in battalions; for every greenshank on the Essex marshes there were formerly twenty. The decoy is now largely disused; even at Goldhanger, Tollesbury, and Old Hall Marsh, they are only employed in a small way. 'The decoyman,' writes Mr. Dutt, 'will soon find his occupation gone. The wholesale slaughter of wild-fowl—thousands of duck, teal and widgeon were sometimes taken weekly in the old decoys—is now condemned as unsportsmanlike, and it is only where, as at Fritton, decoys are worked for the amusement of their owners, rather than for profit, that this old-time method of wild-fowl capture is still pursued.' True, Mr. Dutt writes of Broadland; but his remarks would apply equally well to the neighbourhood of the Blackwater.

But, as I have said, it was not so formerly. Written records tell us of the immense numbers of wild-fowl that haunted the whole East Coast of England. Many species very rare in other districts came here frequently as visitors; some of them—the ruff, oyster-catcher, sheldrake, shoveller, and others—stayed to breed on the marshes

and saltings of Essex. A Mr. Handley and party, as related by Mr. Fitch in his interesting book, 'Maldon and the River Blackwater,' could gather in a morning as many eggs as would fill a bushel measure. Defoe tells us that such vast flights of duck, teal and widgeon abounded at certain seasons on 'Osey, Osyth, or Oosey Island,' that the creek seemed covered with them, and he adds that men of pleasure journeyed from London to enjoy the sport, and often returned well laden—and with an Essex ague on their backs. Two centuries ago there was certainly no lack of birds; but the shooting of them was hardly a healthy pastime. To loiter all day upon saltings and open, wind-swept marshes, or to sit for hours in a punt on misty shallows and creeks in the depth of winter, was to follow a precarious, perhaps a fatal, pleasure. But, as Sganarelle says in Molière's comedy, we have changed all that now—'nous avons changé tout cela'—and one is little likely to contract an ague, or to shoot so many wild-fowl.

I ought, perhaps, to confess that 'I am not a wild-fowler.' I cherish early memories of dark-brown, spotted eggs, lying in the nests of moorhens; of the wary movements of moorhens among the reeds;

of tiny eyots by the river's brim, where dabchicks made their nest; of the call of the coot across wider streams; of the haunt of the water-rail beside quiet waters. I have watched the geese pass in the gray of the morning, stretching their wings towards the south, and have seen mallards, one behind the other, fly swiftly over many a village in pleasant Hertfordshire; but I never shot a bird in the way of sport, nor am I sure that I wish to do so.

My old friend of the inn at Great Stambridge, who remembered so well how the black geese covered the sky at winter, like the locusts of Egypt for multitude, assured me that by firing among the birds at random with an ordinary fowling-piece a man might bring down several plump fowl 'most ev'ry shot.' When he was a boy, a couple of men who knew how to lie in wait for their prey might shoot as many wild-duck in a day as would fill a small cart; and as for shooting a dozen for one's own friends, you might do it before breakfast! I can the readier credit this assertion because wild-ducks often fly one behind the other in such even order that a charge of shot fired across them at a sharp angle can hardly fail to bring several to the ground.

Mr. Palmer, shooting with a friend in the Lake District, picked up nine birds after only one discharge from each barrel.

I was pleased to hear, when at Goldhanger, that during the last few winters greater numbers of geese had visited the Blackwater than during the immediately preceding seasons. Mr. Fitch writes that 'the immense numbers of brent-geese, or black geese, as they are termed locally, frequently still to be seen at the mouth of the Blackwater during winter, can hardly be credited without ocular demonstration.' This is in apparent variance with my remark that the brent-geese now fly in companies rather than in battalions; but, however numerous they may still sometimes appear, the birds were yet more plentiful many year ago. I have talked on this subject with men on the Essex coast, and although their experiences differed in detail, they all at least agreed on this point. Mr. Fitch has brought together several records of local 'bags.' Writing of wild-geese, he mentions that on one occasion 471 birds were killed at a single discharge from 14 guns; on another, 704 birds by 32 guns; on a third, 360 birds by 18 guns. He mentions, too, that one Stubbins of Maldon, punting at the mouth of

Thurslet Creek, killed 50 at a single shot, and that Mr. W. Handley killed 120 in three successive shots, and 288 besides during the same week. Other records referred to by Mr. Fitch tell of 75 widgeon at one shot, and of two single shots at coots which yielded together 113 birds. The last three incidents which I take from the same source are barely credible. We are told that John Basham, junior, of Maldon, shooting on the flats near Bradwell Chapel, killed 108 knots at one discharge; that Harry Handley of Maldon, shooting in Stansgate Bay, killed 432 dunlins in two successive shots; and, yet more marvellous, Charles Hipsey of Maldon killed 320 knots at one discharge—a bird for every shot in his gun! Now, as a matter of fact, this agreement between the number of birds killed and the number of shots in the gun was probably a mere coincidence, and we need not suppose that every bullet found its billet in a knot. In many cases the punt guns are discharged when the birds are on the ground, or near it, and a man at Wigborough, who has shot extensively on and off St. Osyth Marsh, told me that very often more birds are killed by the shingle driven towards them than by the discharge itself. This will be readily understood by all

who have wandered over the saltings and marshes; for these feeding-grounds of the wild-fowl are in places thickly strewn with small rubble and shingle.

I once chatted on this subject with one of the many Mussets of Mersea Island, who have probably shot more wild-fowl than any other family in Essex. He told me that the Mussets have often killed several thousand birds in a season; one of them has a vivid recollection of that day, many years ago, when he bagged 57 red-headed dun-birds at one shot. Old Musset remembered being with a party of punters that set out in thirty-four punts. They pulled cautiously to a spot near 'Brad'l Chapel' (St. Peter's on the Wall), where, on a well-known stretch of feeding-ground, an immense number of geese had alighted. They succeeded in getting well within range without alarming the birds; the guns held three-quarter-pound charges; the thirty-four punts returned with nearly 900 geese, the result of one shot from each gun! On another occasion two brothers of this family went out in a punt at sunset, shooting here and there among the creeks. They returned about noon on the following day, having killed more than 700 birds of various species.

At Peldon I was much amused when listening to the personal recollections of a native whom I need not name. As a boy he frequently went out in his father's punt, and at times saw the geese rise suddenly and spread themselves abroad in 'thousands and thousands, just like clouds.' He deplored the decay of this exciting pastime, which he attributed largely to the many holiday-makers who, in little steam-launches, poke and pry into every navigable creek and waterway, shooting all day, pop, pop, pop, at anything with wings! How is it likely that geese or ducks or widgeon can stand that sort of thing? Much the same lament was recently made by a woman at Goldhanger, who told me she could hear the punt guns on the Blackwater as she lay awake at night, and sometimes wondered that any geese or ducks should be left alive.

I was one day talking about the birds of Essex to a man of Maldon, who has enjoyed much sport in his time, and has shot several rare birds on the Blackwater and in the neighbourhood of Maldon. About forty years ago a purple heron was shot near the bridge across the Chelmer; he showed me the bird, a fine specimen, still in excellent preservation. He had also a goosander and a red-

breasted grebe, both shot near the town. His favourite shooting was done on September evenings some few years ago, when he would shoulder his breech-loader and walk along the wall towards Goldhanger. There was fresh water in the marshes near the wall; here the young ducks, at that time of year in full flight, used to come across from the Blackwater, and he would get a shot among them as they alighted, and a second before they got beyond range. Maldon men, as my friend put it, used to make up a two-punt party to go after ducks, and after spending a few hours near Osey Island, and farther down the Goldhanger side of the Blackwater, in the neighbourhood of the big decoy, would return with their punts quite full of birds.

Recently, when at Salcot, I heard of an expedition by no means so successful. It was the depth of winter, and the weather very severe. The geese were coming southwards in unusual numbers; in fact, excellent sport was reported from all sides —from Maldon to Mersea, from Bradwell to Foulness. Two men, thinking they might have a 'cut in,' took a boat from West Mersea and started for the foreshore at Bradwell. It was late when they pushed off, and already dusk. They

were still some distance from Bradwell when they ran the boat upon a mud-bank, and all their efforts to dislodge her were fruitless. The cold was intense, and their position truly critical. At intervals they could hear the *honk-honk* of the geese, but were too benumbed to shoot even had the flocks come within range. Fortunately, they had brandy, or they might have been frozen to death, for they were not clothed for such a prolonged exposure in an open boat. When at length the men got off, it was early morning ; so benumbed were their hands that they could with difficulty run their boat ashore. Subsequently their faces swelled to a great size, and they bore the marks of that night's exposure for many weeks.

VII

ST. OSYTH

THERE are three ways of approach to St. Osyth from Brightlingsea. You may ramble eastwards from the town, cross Brightlingsea Creek, and enter the village from the north ; you may hire a boat at high-tide and row up the creek to St. Osyth Mill ; you may take the ferry at the Hard, walk across the marsh, keeping the martello towers on your right, and, passing a farm, follow the road that dips towards the 'brook' that turns the mill. I chose the third course, and landed one April afternoon on the beach of firm, weed-strewn shingle, at the point called St. Osyth Stone.

A pleasant prospect met my eyes from that promontory. Opposite was the little fishing-town, whose inhabitants were streaming down to the quay and putting off in boats continually. The tide was running strongly up the Colne ; barges, yachts, fishing-smacks, and other small craft, were hastening up-river towards Wivenhoe or Rowhedge or the

Hythe. Mersea Island, more pleasing to the eye than Canvey or Foulness, lay before me as I turned westwards; I could see the wash of the tide upon its beach, and the figures of a few men near Mersea Stone. Some terns, screeching loudly, soared and swerved in the high wind, or dropped upon the water with a sudden splash when some morsel caught their eye. The spray had touched my face again and again as the old boatman pulled sturdily across the creek; the taste of it was still upon my lips, and the strong wind from the south-west set my heart rejoicing.

A belt of firm sand fringes this coast, where the sea encroaches inch by inch as the centuries go by. The marshland between the winding inlets and tiny pools is well covered with sheep; the turf, soft and springy, reaches to the shore, where the land breaks suddenly, and you step from the pastures on to the sand. To preserve this coast-line from the destructive wash of the sea, a great number of stakes have been sunk into the ground, and portions of tree-trunks are placed here and there to strengthen the defence. It should do any man good to walk briskly across St. Osyth Marsh before breakfast; to inhale the fresh, crisp air; to watch the break of the waves;

to listen to the kittiwakes and lapwings, so abundant in the neighbourhood. I hardly know a more solitary district. On one occasion I walked from the bridge near the mill to the martello tower nearest Brightlingsea, a zigzag route, and met no man, woman, or child, nor saw any person saving a ploughman in a distant field. Here and there are blown sand-hills by the sea ; tall grasses make a perpetual whispering where the narrow waterways creep among the tussocks, and flocks of linnets rise suddenly with loud twitterings. You may suppose yourself at last upon some island of your childish dreams, or may fancy that just such spots must have inspired those bards who sang so sweetly of 'Earth and her folk and all their phantasies.' A glance towards the mouth of the Blackwater or the Colne probably affords a glimpse of some pleasure-yacht with white mainsail and sprit-sail bulging before the wind ; or in 'dirty' weather the waves, maned with spray, may remind you of Kipling's poem. There is, I think, no more wholly delightful spot on the coast of Essex.

My way towards the village led me to a farm-yard, which I had hardly passed when, looking to the north-east, I saw the cottage homes of

St. Osyth scattered upon the hillside above the creek. Beyond them, half hidden among trees, showed the massive brick tower of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul. Approaching a village one is often spared that stretch of uninteresting highroad which usually leads towards a town. On reaching a few cottages whose front-gardens were not fenced off, but were cultivated patches by the wayside, I found myself near the bridge over the creek; on the opposite bank stood the mill, which reminded me of those lines in Crabbe:

> ' "Come, lead me, lassie, to the shade,
> Where willows grow beside the brook,—
> How well I know the sound it made,
> Where, dashing o'er the stony rill,
> It murmur'd to St. Osyth's Mill."
> The lass replied: "The trees are fled,
> They've cut the brook a straighter bed;
> No shades the present lords allow,
> The miller only murmurs now;
> The waters now his mill forsake,
> And form a pond they call a lake." '

The 'lake' is upon your right as you cross the bridge towards the village.

The creek is bordered by narrow saltings on either side, of which only a few patches of grass

are visible at high-water, when it is navigable for barges as far as to the mill. From the creekside the village street twists sharply to the right; many of the cottages are of wood, and some very old, the upper story leaning forward in apparent defiance of the laws of gravitation. The village is of considerable size; it consists of two long streets which intersect at the Ship Inn; I commend it from end to end to the careful study of those interested in the history of cottage architecture. Making my way from the mill, I came presently to an old brick wall, which led me to a triangular green called the Bury. Before me stood the battlemented, flint-faced gatehouse still associated with the name of St. Osyth. That name has come down to us linked with legendary lore. Perhaps there is hardly a story, even in the archives of hagiology, in which fact and fiction are so closely blended. The legend may be read in many books, from Alberic de Vere and the 'Nova Legenda Angliæ' to the latest local guide; but every narrative which I have seen differs essentially in details. I will attempt an 'abstract and brief chronicle.'

Osyth,Ositha, or Osgith, was a daughter of Frithewald, King of Mercia, and Wilburga,

daughter of Penda. As a child, she was cared for by St. Modwen, who placed her in one of two monasteries which she had founded at Streveshal, in the Forest of Arverna. One day her instructress, St. Edith, placed a book in her hands, and told her to carry it to St. Modwen, who lived some distance from the monastery. In order to fulfil her errand Osyth had to cross a stream. As she was on the bridge a sudden gust of wind blew her into the water, where she was drowned. St. Edith, alarmed by the child's prolonged absence, set out to search for her on the third day. On reaching the bridge she met St. Modwen, who told her she had seen a vision, and that an angel had directed her to the river. The two ladies spoke with some shepherds, who remembered seeing the girl ; they then prayed together, and on one of them crying 'Osyth!' loudly, three times, the child presently came up out of the river, with the book, undamaged, in her hand !

Thus far the story is sufficiently romantic ; but our credulity is taxed even more greatly in the sequel. Osyth, like other young ladies in the seventh century, vowed to spend her life in perpetual virginity. By-and-by, however, her parents compelled her to wed with Sighere, King of the

East Saxons, but the marriage was not destined to be consummated. An unusually fine stag happened to stray close to the palace of Sighere, and the King hastened to the chase. Osyth, having regard for her vow of virginity rather than for her wifely fidelity, seized the opportunity to effect her purpose during her lord's absence. She fled from her new home and took the veil. Sighere, we are told, loved his wife sincerely, and refused to draw her from her chosen seclusion. Instead, he gave her the Manor of Chich, since called Osyth, thereby providing her with the means necessary to found a nunnery after her own heart. Here she gathered around her a company of like-minded women, whose hearts God had touched; and here they passed several years of austere self-discipline and piety. The nunnery was surrounded by a largely heathen population, yet it appears to have been unmolested at their hands.

But the times waxed troublous, and the Danes, led by Hubba, invaded our land. In 653 they plundered and destroyed the nunnery, and seized Osyth. She was urged to renounce the Christian faith, but stubbornly refused. Then her captors led her a little northwards from the nunnery, to a spot since called Nun's Wood, and there, to

punish her obstinacy, they cut off her head. And, lo! just where the head fell there issued from the ground a spring of water, clear as crystal, and potent in the healing of infirmities. This miracle was followed by a second; for Osyth, by heavenly guidance, carried her head to the neighbouring church, which she had herself caused to be erected. Reaching the door, she knocked loudly with bloody hands, and immediately expired. Her body was obtained by Frithewald and Wilburga, who placed it in a leaden chest or coffin, and conveyed it to Aylesbury; but it was afterwards stolen, brought to Chich, and buried with solemnity in the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, to which she had so wonderfully found her way after her martyrdom. But such relics were too holy to rest. One night in each year she revisited the scene of her murder, holding her head in her hands. Moreover, both at Aylesbury and afterwards at Chich a visit to her tomb proved of sovereign efficacy to the sick and palsied, and we are told that Alfword, Bishop of London, whilst endeavouring to purloin her bones was smitten with leprosy. This was in 1044.

There is much evidence to show that this astonishing story was substantially credited in

medieval days. In the British Museum is a manuscript of the age of Canute, which records that St. Osyth lies buried in St. Peter's Minster at Chich. She forms the subject of an ancient fresco in St. Albans Abbey, where an altar in the north transept bore her name, and a statue representing her is now on the altar-screen. Matthew Paris, who lived and wrote at St. Albans, relates a curious story about this saint. He tells us that during the reign of John an Essex husbandman, when shown by some saints the happiest place in Paradise, saw in that spot the glorified Osyth. About a hundred years ago a workman found the seal of St. Osyth's Priory, known to have been used in the thirteenth century; the seal, now in the British Museum, represents the saint with her head in her hands; before her is a key, behind her a sword. The old font in the village church, long since defaced, bears some traces of the figure of an angel, which is said—I do not know on what authority—to have formerly held the head of St. Osyth in a napkin. When entering the priory ruins by the great gateway, you may notice on the bosses intersecting the ribs of the groined roof the quaintly-carved head of the saint; and there is little doubt that the niche immediately above the

outer arch was once occupied by her image. An inventory of the priory, taken at the Dissolution, mentions, *inter alia*, the skull of St. Osyth 'closyed in sylver.'

It is probable that the nunnery of St. Osyth lay long in ruins before Richard de Belmeis, or Beaumes, Bishop of London (1108-1128), founded on or near its site a monastery for Augustinian Canons. He bestowed upon it the neighbouring church and a goodly parcel of land; and so many gifts were showered upon it by kings, princes and peoples that very shortly it became one of the richest foundations in England. William de Corbauil, first Abbot of this priory, was a noteworthy man, though not a worthy prelate; he is chiefly remembered for the fact that when he became Archbishop of Canterbury he acknowledged himself to be merely the Pope's deputy in this country! The last Abbot was John Colchester, who, together with sixteen Canons, surrendered the property to the commissioners of the Defender of the Faith on July 28, 1539. The squabble which followed for the possession of so rich a prize is well known. It was coveted by Sir Thomas Audeley, Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations; by the haughty De Veres; and by Thomas Cromwell, who, having

power to do so, kept it for himself. He was little richer for his spoil ; for he meddled in the matter of Anne of Cleves, and lost his head on July 28, 1540, one year after the surrender of the priory. We touch the romantic again in the narrative of subsequent owners. For here Elizabeth was entertained on two occasions by Lord John D'Arcy, and during, I think, the latter festivities there happened 'great thunder and lightning as any man had ever heard, from about eight or nine till past ten, then great rain till midnight, insomuch that the people thought that the world was at an end, and the day of doom come, it was so terrible.' In 1639 a daughter of the D'Arcys, Elizabeth, afterwards Countess Rivers, acquired the property. Three years later she was the victim of an anti-Popish riot ; a large mob attacked and looted the house ; she herself narrowly escaped, and fled first to Bury St. Edmunds, and afterwards to London. She was known to be a staunch Romanist and Royalist. Truly, as Mr. John Morley has remarked, we seldom raise the cry 'No Popery !' without making ourselves ridiculous or worse.

There are no remaining ruins of the nunnery founded by St. Osyth. The oldest portions of the

present ruins are those of the Augustinian priory, rebuilt early in the sixteenth century, in the days of Abbot John Vyntenor, of which the gatehouse, of flint with freestone tracery, is a noble relic. By obtaining a ticket at one of the inns in the village you may ramble almost at will among these interesting mementoes, for the monastic ruins are largely incorporated with the beautiful residence now the home of Sir J. H. Johnson. The estate was purchased from the Nassau family in 1863, and the present owner has done much to insure the preservation of these historic buildings. The house has been lavishly adorned, and the grounds beautifully laid out ; but at every turn you see some fragment of picturesque ruin, so utilized as to blend harmoniously with the whole. My own recollections are somewhat vague, for it was late when I reached the gatehouse and obtained entrance. But I peered into the Early English crypt, and through old doorways covered with ivy. I noticed richly ornamented, clustered chimneys, and climbed the Abbot's Tower, a structure about 80 feet high, in flint and stone diaper with corner turrets. The spiral stairs were originally of stone, replaced long since by wood, and the walls are plentifully scribbled upon by

those idle folk who love to leave their mark behind them—'they come to Athens and they write their name.' When I reached the top there was daylight sufficient to show how superb a view must lay stretched below, and I wondered how often the worthy and presumably fat Abbot had toiled up those steps in order to sun himself upon the summit of his tower and look out towards Mersea Island and the gleaming Blackwater (it usually belies its name), or across the German Ocean towards the mouth of the Thames and the coast of Kent, clearly visible on unclouded mornings.

A little later, as the thrushes were at their evening hymns, I lingered among lawns and flower-beds and secluded walks, pleased by the fragrance of the yellow wall-flowers that blossomed profusely on ruined walls. Unmindful as to whether the priory was or was not built upon the site of the nunnery founded by Osyth, I ignored by an effort of retrospect the intervening centuries, and was back in thought among the persons of this strange legend. I tried to picture some incidents which must often have transpired in those days of voluntary seclusion so long ago—the early orisons, the fastings, the late vigils, the

hours of uninterrupted meditation upon the agonies of Christ or the glories of Mary. On this very spot, as is commonly believed, those nuns often walked silently during what Rossetti so beautifully calls 'the hour of sisterly sweet hand in hand.' A life of privation and discipline was necessary in their eyes; for they lived in days when the soul was believed to thrive upon the sufferings of the body. I fancied how, day by day, those women would linger in the secluded grounds adjoining their common home, reading, meditating, or tending their flowers as in the picture entitled 'Convent Thoughts,' painted by Allston Collins. And the fancy brought to mind a sonnet penned by Longfellow. That sonnet commemorates a far different foundation, but, singularly enough, it might apply almost in its entirety to the Priory of St. Osyth:

'There came a Saxon *nun*, and founded here
A priory, pillaged by marauding Danes,
So that thereof no vestige now remains;

* * * *

. . . . . Far over leagues of land
And leagues of sea looks forth its noble tower,
And far around the chiming bells are heard;
So may that sacred name for ever stand,
A landmark, and a symbol of that power
That lies concentred in a single word.'

VIII

IN THE VALLEY OF THE CROUCH

We can never too strongly insist that the world is abundantly interesting everywhere—to those who do not refuse to be interested. Some persons live for years in a village which to them is dull indeed; but one day there comes into their home one learned in archæology, one who knows the village and its surroundings, its history and romance, as he knows the palm of his hand. And the eyes of those persons are presently opened, and they realize that for so many years, albeit they knew it not, they have sat beside the shores of old romance. I write from experience. I passed the best days of my boyhood in an old, old town which is now a city; where the Roman left the impress of his cunning on every hand; a town hardly inferior to Canterbury or York or Winchester in its historic and traditional interest. Like so many others, I wasted my opportunities, and have since bitterly regretted that I studied

and observed to such little purpose in the venerable city of St. Albans by the winding Ver.

These, perhaps, are trite reflections, but I write them here because they occurred to me recently during a ramble in the valley of the Crouch, where I found much of interest. On a faultless spring morning I left the train at Hockley, prepared to wander northwards, to cross the river at Fambridge Ferry, to climb Kit Hill, so dangerous to cyclists, to visit the villages of Cold Norton and Purleigh, and to spend a few hours in Maldon. Of Maldon I must write in another chapter. In the meantime here are some impressions and recollections of a most enjoyable ramble, written, as we sometimes say, with a running pen, but not, I hope, devoid of interest.

Near the approach to Hockley Station stand two small houses, with red-tiled roofs and porches of lattice-work. They bear the name 'Spa Cottages.' Here, at starting, was a name to give me pause. About the year 1840 some men discovered a medicinal spring by the roadside. That discovery started a fresh chapter in the history of Hockley. The virtues of the water were proclaimed far and wide ; a hotel—the Spa Hotel—was built, and also, as necessary adjuncts to the

spring, a pump-room and baths. Nearly opposite the two cottages stands a deserted building of brick, faced with stucco and fronted with pilasters, its doors and windows boarded up. Above are the words 'Hockley Spa.' I learned the story of this ill-fated enterprise from the lips of an old man in the neighbourhood. He was present when the spring was first discovered; in fact, he 'elp t'dig on't out.' He remembered the opening of the pump-room and baths, the grand folks who drove down in coaches from London week by week, and the stir and excitement in the parish whilst the 'boom' lasted. So many persons drove into Hockley from distant parts that the accommodation of the parish was utterly inadequate, and some stables were hastily run up near where the railway-station now stands. 'But, lor, sir! it didn't last. Afore long people got tired o' comin'; then the place got in Chanc'ry or suthen, an' things were stole-like, an' then it all stopt. I s'pose as they can't pull on't down—leastways, it stan's there now, as yer can see for yersel'. In this 'ouse just 'ere ther was a man wot 'anged 'issel', but 'e wusn't noways concerned with the spa.'

A somewhat similar story is told at Witham, a

small town on the Chelmsford road. There a chalybeate spring was discovered rather more than a century before that at Hockley, but after considerable vogue it fell into disuse, and the very circumstance is now almost forgotten.

Of still more interest than the old spa at Hockley is the parish church, dedicated to St. Peter. It stands upon a little knoll, in a pleasant situation on the hill-top, overlooking the Crouch River. The octagonal tower is unusually low and massive, and I take Mr. Christy's word for it that, while the walls and a small window are Norman, the doors are Early English, and the windows for the most part Perpendicular. Tradition tells us that on this spot Canute erected a church as a thanksgiving for his victory over Edmund Ironside, at the Battle of Ashingdon, near by. The battle was fought in 1016. Freeman, however, to say nothing of less authoritative writers, places the site of Canute's building nearer to the field of battle at Assandun (Ashingdon). 'The spot which saw Canute's victory saw a few years later his offering. . . . Then arose the joint work of Canute and Thurkill, the minster of stone and lime, whose materials need to be noted in the timber land of Essex.' In the opinion

of Mr. Beckett, who knows Essex as few men know it, the 'curious old church at Ashingdon is, at all events in its main fabric, identical with the minster of Canute.' An interesting reference to the Battle of Assandun is in one of Southey's many volumes: 'No former battle ever proved so disastrous to the people of this island; and, except the Battle of Hastings, no later one. For when Edmund, inspiring his men with his own intrepidity, was on the point of obtaining a great and decisive victory, Edric, with all the force under his command, took flight, leaving him thus to contend against an overpowering superiority of numbers. The bravest chiefs—Ulfkytel was among them—would not survive the overthrow of the nation: they gathered their faithful followers, and, forming a compact body, fought till they perished to a man; the Saxon Chronicle says that all the nobility of the English nation were then cut off. Bishops and Abbots, as well as Ealdormen, sacrificed themselves in brave despair; but Edmund Ironside, with a braver hope, fled from the field almost alone; not to seek an asylum, but to collect, if possible, another army, and fall upon the Danes while they were exulting over their recent success in the confidence of vain security.'

I wandered down the winding road towards Fambridge Marsh; the pastures were covered over with flocks, the banks bright with stitchwort. The happy valley spread out before me afforded a pleasing prospect, lit up from end to end by a wondrous sunlight of almost intolerable brightness, and welling over with peace. The several winding rivers greatly enhance the charm of the eastern half of Essex; for between these waterways there is a continual alternation of hill and dale. The hills do not tower to great heights, nor are the valleys of large extent; but the stretches of country between the Roche, the Crouch, the Chelmer, the Colne, and the Stour, are each pleasantly varied to the eye, and are altogether more picturesque than is supposed by many who, having never rambled farther east than to Romford or Barking, have somehow acquired the notion that Essex is uniformly flat and wholly uninteresting. As I crossed Fambridge Marsh, strolling hither and thither at random, a veritable vagrant, I created much excitement among the lapwings, and felt sure the nests of several were close at hand. One bird in particular rose almost at my feet and circled round me, with loud cries, for a considerable distance, but I forbore to search for her nest.

I came at length to a plank-spanned tributary stream; there was a small gap in the bankside through which the water splashed noisily downwards, to join a yet more narrow rivulet. The tiny waterfall glittered and sparkled as diamonds might if scattered in the sun; a redshank passed me swiftly; a wren, busy with his voluble warblings, was watching me from his perch on a stunted willow. Often as I have lingered in such spots, I discover a fresh charm on every occasion. The world, as Emerson puts it, is new every morning.

At the Ferry-Boat Inn I was reminded of a story which has been often told and is worth telling again. It is the story of the famous Cammock elopement, narrated in detail by Morant and copied by subsequent writers. Morant's two fine folios are not upon my shelves, but I give the gist of the adventure. Cammock was a follower of that Lord Rich who became Earl of Warwick in 1618. Lord Rich had a daughter named Frances, and Cammock fell in love with her. Probably, though both were not young, 'one was beautiful,' as in Byron's 'Dream.' The course of their true love ran anything but smoothly at first, for Lord Rich did not approve of the match. So one day, as the

lovers were journeying from Leighs to Rochford Hall, they determined to be wedded there and then. They rode hastily to Fambridge Ferry. Just as they reached the river's side they heard their pursuers in the distance. No time was to be lost ; but, as luck would have it, the ferry-boat was on the farther bank. Where there's a will there's a way, especially among lovers. Cammock and his lady were on horseback together, and in that manner swam across the Crouch, a task of no small magnitude, for a strong tide was running at the time. They were but halfway across when their pursuers reached the bank ; one of Lord Rich's horses neighed, and the horse upon which the 'pretty pair' were seated attempted to turn back again, and could with difficulty be urged forward. Eventually they reached Maldon, where the marriage was consummated, and I am pleased to relate that they lived happily ever afterwards. For the father was so impressed by the story of his daughter's devotion that he relented and gave the pair his blessing ; and Frances lived to bear her husband two sons and eleven daughters. Readers who visit Maldon should go into All Saints' Church. There, on the wall of the north aisle, is the Cammock monument. Under a

heavy marble canopy are the effigies of Thomas Cammock and his two wives, Ursula and Frances; beneath them kneel their children, twenty-two in all. I could think of little else but this strange story as I crossed by the ferry. The story runs that Cammock was unwilling to risk the life of Frances, and urged her not to cross, but the Earl's daughter was brave, and she elected to do or die. I thought of the hasty landing, and of the ride into Maldon, with their wet clothes still about them, and such words upon their lips as comforted Lochinvar when he said, 'They'll be fleet steeds that follow.'

Students who love to gather up the stray strands of history find much of interest, indirectly, in the story of Fambridge Hall, a house of ancient foundation, close to South Fambridge Marsh. In 1166 the manor-house was held by one Reginald de Fambridge, who rented it of Nigel, Bishop of Ely. In 1442 Peter Osborn, who was of a good old family, lived at Purleigh, close by; his son Peter was an excellent scholar and zealous for the Reformation, and to him, in 1560, the Manor of Fambridge Hall was granted by Elizabeth. Under Edward VI. Peter Osborn was Keeper of the Privy Purse. At his house (in London?) died

Sir John Cheke, first 'Royal Professor' of Greek at Cambridge. His grandson, Sir Peter, held Guernsey for Charles I.; he was the father of Dorothy Osborn(e), the wife of Sir William Temple. Dorothy's love-letters, so highly praised by Macaulay, have recently been published in a small volume. Sir Peter lived much at Chicksands in Bedfordshire; but Fambridge Hall was, I suppose, his property, for it continued in the family from the time of Elizabeth's gift until the day when Sir Danvers Osborn, who succeeded to the title in 1720, sold it to 'John Stevenson, Esquire.'

I walked up the hill after leaving the Ferry-Boat Inn, and soon, turning to the left, found myself before all that remains of the small brick Church of the Holy Trinity. The structure is Late Perpendicular, with a tiny wooden belfry; the whole is rapidly falling into decay. I lingered in the silent, weed-choked, deserted graveyard, and peered through a broken window until I discerned the ancient octagonal font. Everything here speaks of age; the registers commence in 1556, and the mutilated brass to the memory of William Osborn, his wife Ann (Walker), and their sixteen children, dates from 1590. The manor was formerly called Fambregg. At the time of Edward the Confessor

it was owned by Godric, a 'freeman'; in 1276 by John Fitzjohn; but the record of its owners is fragmentary up to the year 1328, when it belonged to William de Burgh, Earl of Ulster. I am here only concerned with landlords of historic or romantic interest, or I might give a long and almost complete list of the men who owned this little village of North Fambridge from the fourteenth century. I may mention, however, that the manor was forfeited to the Crown by Richard Coningsborough, Earl of Cambridge, the second son of that Edmund de Langley who took his name from the Hertfordshire village where he was born in 1344, and of whom I have written elsewhere.* Richard was implicated in a plot against Henry V., for which folly he lost his head and his estate.

Before setting my face towards Cold Norton and Purleigh, I rambled once again as far as to the ferry, pleased beyond expectation with every aspect of this picturesque country: the craft upon the winding waters of the Crouch; the smell of the weed upon the ooze at low water; the boatmen, in their blue jerseys, loitering outside the Ferry-Boat Inn and the Yacht Club; the diversified scenery of the opposite prospect, sloping

* 'Highways and Byways in Hertfordshire,' chap. iv.

upwards to the south. It is this diversity which makes England, as a whole, so pleasing to the eye. A relative of mine, long resident in Connecticut and familiar with the landscapes of several other States, once visited me in the course of some rambles in England. He spoke with surprising enthusiasm of English scenery, and attributed its sovereign charm to its infinite variety. From this standpoint Essex is worth visiting, and any who follow in the footsteps of these marsh-country rambles will have the additional advantage of an almost continuous prospect of creek, river, or sea. No highroads in this neighbourhood stretch long and straight and dusty to the town; but there are coppices and cornfields, meadows and marshes; villages on wooded slopes, and hamlets by the waterside; old churches, old cottages, old manor-houses, old customs and superstitions. At North Fambridge, even to-day, the sentimental traveller will find himself as wholly out of touch with the 'herd' as heart can wish. A curious incident was witnessed here by a rambling archæologist a few years ago. A number of poor persons had come to pick peas in the neighbouring fields; but no provision had been made for their immediate requirements, and while the good wife of the

Ferry-Boat Inn was buying loaves for them in a near village, they waited, hungry and clamorous, before the inn.

My road towards Cold Norton and Purleigh brought me presently to Kit Hill, a fact which I mention in order to warn cyclists to beware of that dangerous steep. Kit Hill is of no great length, but it falls so sharply from north to south, and twists so awkwardly near its foot, that the over-venturesome rider may very possibly come to grief. Being on foot, I had nothing to push before me as I climbed its face. On its summit were some young girls, with their aprons filled with wild-flowers. I noticed them as I turned after a survey of the valley stretching southwards; one of them, catching my eye, offered me some stitchworts, half in jest. It is a far cry from Drachenfels to Essex, but I remembered Byron's lines about

> 'Peasant girls with light blue eyes,
> And hands that offer early flowers.'

Here again, as I felt when on Wakering Marsh, the human face completed the picture; and I cherish, as a happy memory, the merry laughter that rang out from time to time as those children wended their way down the hill.

At Cold Norton, so picturesquely scattered over the next ridge to the north-west, you find yourself, if you visit the village in the spring, near a rookery of considerable size and of much commotion. The cottage gardens are lovingly tended, and thrushes sing among the evergreens from daybreak to sunset. But the old parish church mentioned in the county histories—a small building, with a wooden spire, dedicated to St. Stephen—has long been a thing of the past, having been superseded, in 1853, by a stone structure built at the expense of the then Rector, the Rev. William Holland. The present church is Decorated; the pulpit and lectern are of carved oak from the beams of the old building. In the churchyard you may see the tomb of an Essex J.P. who died 200 years ago, one Will. Walker, Esq. He lived close by, at Cold Norton Hall, as did also his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, who all bore his name and share his grave. The holders of their fine old homestead are known to history; we read of John de Batton, of De Bohuns, Fitzwalters, Staffords, Bouchiers, and other worthies not a few. I did not trouble my head about them when at Cold Norton, but idled away an hour in the low country westwards from the village, where the

railway winds between banks prettily wooded, and a narrow strip of coppice by the roadside is carpeted with primroses and violets from March to May. It was a warm afternoon; rabbits were lopping in and out of their burrows in leisurely fashion, and a hawk passed over my head in the direction of Purleigh. I followed in its wake, and was struck, as others must have been before me, with the perfect picture presented by the village in the distance. Beautifully softened by the waning light lay an elevated district, dotted with fruit-trees in flower, between which peeped red-tiled roofs and cottage chimneys, and, above all, the battlemented tower of All Saints' Church. Entering at the south porch, of massive brick, I noticed an old inscription in the chancel which I thought worth copying :

'Here vnder lieth bvried ye bodie of Mr. Iohn Freake Batchelor of Divinitie, Late parson of Purleighe and Archdeacon of Norwiche who died the 4th daie of September 1604 and in the 60th year of his age, having had issue of his bodie begotten 6 sonnes and 7 daughters.'

The Rev. Edward Freake, also sometime Rector of Purleigh, was Chief Almoner to Queen Elizabeth, and successively Bishop of Rochester, Norwich, and Worcester.

IX

THE ROMANCE OF MALDON

'THIS populous town is picturesquely situated on an eminence, rising from the southern border of the ancient Idumanum on Blackwater Bay, and commanding an extensive prospect over the marshy grounds towards the sea.' So wrote one of the historians of Essex in his account of Maldon, a town so ancient that it was believed by Camden and others to be the Colonia Camulodunum of that invaluable work 'Antonini Itinerarium.' Camden was mistaken, as were others after him. We know that Colonia was about fifty-two miles from London; Maldon is hardly forty, and modern archæologists, for this and other reasons, have properly insisted that Colchester must be identified with the town referred to by the Roman topographers. But the early supposition died hard. Drayton, in his 'Polyolbion,' lends it his authority. Milton, in his digest from the old chroniclers, repeats that the chief seat of Kymbeline

or Cimobeline was at Camulodunum or Maldon, 'as by certain of his coins, yet to be seen, appears.' Defoe repeated the tradition.

Nevertheless, the Roman was at Maldon, and when he quitted its precincts he left his coins and pottery behind him, as he did elsewhere. But the story of his doings here is not recorded, and we date the history of Maldon from those troubled times, early in the tenth century, when the Danes were pillaging and slaying in East Anglia. Edward the Elder encamped with his army at 'Maeldune,' whilst others among his followers erected a stronghold at Witham, a few miles to the north-west.

In 991 the Danes attacked the town in great force, but it held out in a state of siege until help came from a distance and the Danes were driven off. They came again under Unlaf soon afterwards, and were opposed by Byrthnoth the Ealdorman, of heroic memory. The Danes were victorious; but the Saxons fought nobly to the end, and their valour inspired that Anglo-Saxon poem, the 'Song of the Fight at Maldon.' Mr. Stopford Brooke has written of the spirited beauty of this old battle-song—the addresses of heralds and soldiers before the fight, the hand-to-hand combats of

mighty men of valour, the echo of the onset and the shouting. To me its sovereign charm lies in its truly English character. 'In the rude chivalry which disdains to take vantage-ground of the Danes, in the way in which the friends and churls of Byrthnoth die one by one, avenging their lord, keeping faithful the tie of kinship and clanship, in the cry not to yield a foot's breadth of earth, in the loving sadness with which home is spoken of, the poem is English to the core.' Freeman deemed these verses of the fight at Maldon worthy to rank beside the battle-songs of old Greece.

I have overlooked the valley of the Blackwater, where this fight took place nine centuries ago, and have repeated Longfellow's words as I have seldom repeated them before :

> 'There are dreams that cannot die :
> There are thoughts that make the strong heart weak,
> And bring a pallor into the cheek,
> And a mist before the eye.'

The course of the action may be followed in some details by all who read the poem. We learn that for some time the flowing tide of the Panta (Blackwater) separated the combatants, all too impatient for the fray. I quote from Colonel

Lumsden's rendering of these fine old verses in *Macmillan's Magazine:*

'Between them flowed the tide:
For after ebb the flood rolled up, it filled the channel wide.
And till their spears together clashed too long the time did seem
To Viking and East Saxon ranks arrayed by Panta's stream:
For neither could the other hurt save by the arrows' flight
Till ebb of tide.'

Presently the story bears a singular resemblance to the ballad of Horatius; for the song proceeds to celebrate the bravery of Wulfstan, Alfhere and Maccus, who defended the passage of the bridge across the Panta so long as they had strength to wield their weapons. Indeed, these three worthies disputed the path so stoutly that the Vikings were obliged to cross by a ford some distance off, which Byrthnoth allowed them to do unmolested—a fatal courtesy, as the event proved. Byrthnoth himself was slain whilst fighting valiantly; a cowardly follower rode his horse off the field, and after a terrible slaughter victory lay with the Vikings. The incidents of the fight should be cherished by the men of Maldon—the herald demanding a ransom from the town; the bold followers of Byrthnoth streaming down to the

waterside, their bucklers on their arms; the blade of Byrthnoth 'brown-edged and broad,' raining lusty blows on the corslet of his antagonist; the hacking of his body by the enemy when at last he fell; the eagle and the raven hovering over the thickly-strewn battlefield. We often speak of old songs with contempt; but it is to them we owe some of our most cherished inspirations. After mangling his body, the Danes carried the head of Byrthnoth into Denmark, where they probably made a drinking-cup of his skull; the Ely Chronicle states that when the Abbot of Ely interred the body in the church to which Byrthnoth had been a benefactor, a head of wax was substituted.

There are quaint nooks and corners in old Maldon, and I, who have loitered among them from sunrise to sunset, have always found abundant entertainment. The rambler who can spend but few days in the neighbourhood will do well to utilize odd moments, for there is much to see and learn. I will ask my readers to stroll with me in haphazard fashion, to enter the town by way of Spital Road and the High Street, then to ramble towards Beeleigh Abbey and the valley of the Chelmer, re-enter the town by the bridge

near the lime-kiln, and part company on the Hythe.

If we alight at the West Station, we shall presently notice, on our right-hand side as we approach the town, the Spital Farm. It occupies the site of the ancient Leper Hospital of St. Giles, of which the large cruciform barn near the swing-gate is a genuine relic. Inside there is much massive timber in the roof, which supports a layer of tiles, overlaid in turn by thatch. Worked into the walls are many Roman bricks, still hard as adamant, and the round buttress at the eastern end looks, as Mr. Fitch has remarked, like the remains of a Roman wall *in situ*. At the south end are three blocked windows, probably thirteenth-century; at the west we notice a blocked Norman window and a doorway of later date. Little is known of the story of this ancient foundation. It is said to have owed its existence to the tender solicitudes of one of the Kings of England, who founded here a retreat for leprous men. Like similar institutions, it was maintained by forfeitures of such offal as was eaten by none save lepers. We read that during the reign of Henry IV. one Robert Mansfield was Warden here ; he neglected his duties, neither ministering to any leper nor

maintaining a chaplain, and so, in accordance with law, the property fell to the Crown. It was, however, subsequently restored, and was eventually (1481) conveyed to Thomas Scarlet, Abbot of Beeleigh near by. It is not quite evident what part of the hospital is represented by this old barn. Many have supposed that it was the lepers' chapel, but it is doubtful whether any chapel would be attached to such a hospital.

It is but a few minutes' walk from the Spital Farm to the site of St. Peter's Church, at the junction of High Street and Market Hill. I write *site*, for only the tower now stands, the adjoining brick building having long done duty as a school-house, until the free school was removed to the London Road a few years ago. The spot is sacred to the memory of one who loved books rather than battles. The famous library contained in this old school-house was collected and presented to the town by Thomas Plume, D.D. Plume was baptized in All Saints' Church near by in August, 1630; he became in due course Archdeacon of Rochester; he died in 1704, and lies in Longfield Churchyard, Kent; his portrait hangs in the Council Chamber of Maldon Town. I was unable to inspect the library, but visitors can

obtain entrance during certain hours, and will notice many valuable treasures. Among them are old editions of Skelton, Gower, and Milton, the Complutensian Bible, Brian Walton's 'Polyglott,' and Weever's 'Monuments.'

Visitors loitering in this part of Maldon will probably hear something of a man very different from Dr. Plume*—one whose story is of more interest in many eyes. In the register of All Saints' Church there is a long entry concerning Edward Bright. This man, 'the great man of Maldon,' was a shopkeeper in the town ; he lived in Church House, at the corner of St. Peter's Churchyard. He attained such enormous bodily girth that he is numbered among the fattest men on record, and was recently referred to in the *Standard*, in a paragraph touching a similar prodigy. We are told that in his thirteenth year he weighed 144 pounds, in his twentieth 336 pounds. He was weighed shortly before his death in 1750, and turned the scale at 600 pounds. He

* Readers of 'Evelyn's Diary' may remember an interesting allusion to Dr. Plume : '1666. September 16. I went to Greenwich church, where Mr. Plume preached very well . . . taking occasion from the late unparalell'd conflagration to remind us how we ought to walke more holyly in all manner of conversation.'

measured 5 feet 9½ inches in height, 5 feet 6 inches round the chest, and 6 feet 11 inches at his largest girth. Bright was once a post-boy, and rode to Chelmsford and back every day. The post-horn he used is still in existence, as also the baize waistcoat in which was 'the surprising Bett Decided.' This bet was settled on December 1, 1750, when, at the Black Bull near by, kept by a widow named Day, the waistcoat was produced and seven men were easily buttoned within its girth! In no mere figurative sense life must have been burdensome to the fat man of Maldon, and if ever a man uttered from the depth of his heart the sigh of Hamlet—'Oh that this too, too solid flesh would melt!'—that man must have been Edward Bright. When last in Maldon I was assured that Bright died early in the nineteenth century; but this was not the case. I mention the fact lest other inquirers should be led astray.

From St. Peter's Church our way lies down Market Hill and Cromwell Lane towards Beeleigh Abbey—now a pleasant farmstead, once the home of Premonstratensian monks. The mention of this abbey brings to mind a sunny spring day which I passed in its neighbourhood. The morning broke with a splendour of sky effects such as

I have seldom witnessed, and the golden glow of sunrise was still over half the heavens as I paused on the bridge that crosses the railroad. Before me lay the valley of the Chelmer, a winding river whose course may be pleasantly followed, for it leads us through quiet pastoral scenery and suggests interesting memories. Rising at Wimbish, a little south-east from Saffron Walden, and close to the source of the Pant, it flows towards Thaxted, where Samuel Purchas* was born in 1577, and where stands that grand old church which is called the Cathedral of Essex. Thence it flows southwards to Tilty, where formerly, in the well-wooded valley, it was serviceable to those Cistercian monks who lived upon its banks until Abbot Palmer surrendered his prerogatives in 1535. Bearing thence in a more eastward direction, it passes near Little Dunmow, where so many couples have proved their ideal happiness in wedlock, and have carried off their flitch of bacon, since, as is believed, the custom was instituted by Robert Fitzwalter in the reign of Henry III. Thence it pursues its way towards Great Waltham,

* Purchas was educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, and was curate of Purleigh under parson John Freake (see *ante*, p. 115).

'the town in the woods,' about six miles distant, where it flows through the picturesque park of the 'Langleys' estate, and continues its southward course until it reaches Chelmers-ford—*i.e.*, Chelmsford. Here the Chelmer unites with the Cann, and their waters are thenceforward navigable for barges plying to and from Maldon.

It is but a short walk from the bridge over the Great Eastern Railway to what was once Beeleigh Abbey. Much is altered, as was inevitable, but the monks would recognise their home if they could see it now. Luxuriant ivy clings to its walls, mingling its tendrils with branches of the rose. Ancient and modern meet together in the structure, the most obvious of many old features being, perhaps, the Early English lancets and doorways, the curiously-patterned timber between the Elizabethan brickwork near the south door, and the groined roof of the chapter-house. A detailed description of separate apartments would hardly be interesting, nor will it be looked for in a volume of 'Rambles'; moreover, the subject would be perilous to any save an architect. Readers will find several drawings of Beeleigh Abbey in Mr. Barrett's book on the highways,

byways, and waterways of Essex ; they would do better still to explore the neighbourhood for themselves. The Chelmer, in which the monks so often fished, flows a little to the north ; beyond are the golf-links. History, as we know, repeats itself. Monastic brotherhoods have reappeared in our midst since the days of the Oxford Movement ; nuns, ejected from their retreats in France, are seeking refuge in a freer country. Is it mere idle fancy which leads us to imagine a return to the old order of things in such places as Beeleigh Abbey, and conjures up before us a future when the monk shall again open the ponderous door to the wayfarer, or tell his beads in the tiny chamber overlooking the stream ?

The monks of Beeleigh Abbey had their mill near by, as they had their fish-ponds, but only the site can be seen, for the modern mill which stood here was itself burnt down in 1875. The riverside pathway beyond leads through so rich a scenery that one is not surprised to learn how Sir Edwin Landseer loved it when he stayed at the farm called Beeleigh Grange. I turned aside near the flood-gates and found myself in a pretty thicket, crossed by trickling streamlets ; lesser celandines showed their golden stars beneath

a dense growth of willows, but were quite outshone by the marsh-marigolds, which flourish here profusely and attain unusual size. Near this thicket stands the Lion Elm ; any local child will point it out, and will show you how curiously the contour of the left side of its trunk, as seen from the road, resembles a lion's head. So close is the likeness that the tree is figured in Mr. Barrett's book.

Here, too, close to the Chelmer, stands a tiny cottage, so picturesquely situated on a jutting promontory as to arrest the eye as you approach the rustic bridge that spans a twisting backwater. The cottage is built largely of whited boards, with red-tiled roof ; the garden slopes down to the water, which nearly surrounds it, and is bright with primroses, daffodils, wall-flowers, flags and myosotis. The cottager can hear continually the roar of the water at the Long Weir ; the voice of the blackbird in a near spinney wakes him in the morning, when he may scent the briar roses that overhang the bridge. The backwater, usually shallow, sometimes rushes in spate round this promontory : a man told me that he had seen the little garden almost under water after heavy rains. The land between the bridge

and the Long Weir is a land of flowers and streams:

> 'A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
> Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.'

Here the Chelmer and the Blackwater unite: here the 'Navigation' and the old river contribute to the diversity of the scene. The old river is known to anglers for its fat gudgeon and big bream. I will not mar the words of Mr. Fitch, who knows and loves the neighbourhood so well. 'The river itself and the river-banks abound with flowers. . . . The meadow-rue, the fragrant meadow-sweet, the showy purple loosestrife, the true forget-me-not, a flower recalling many poetical associations, various species of willow-herb (Epilobium), locally known as "apple" or "cherry-pie," the tall and sweet-smelling hemp agrimony, and the lowly skull-cap, are all abundant along the banks, and further in the water we find the great water-dock with its enormous palm-like leaves, the yellow iris or flag, the great water-plantain, the arrow-head, the beautiful and interesting flowering rush with its handsome rosy umbels, the bur-reed with its peculiar flowers and seed-balls, and many other water-plants.' The

scenery is less charming as we approach Maldon, and presently we need for guide the antiquary rather than the botanist.

When Defoe visited Maldon in 1722, he seems to have found little to interest him in the town; but he tells us that large quantities of corn were then carried by water from Maldon to London. He tells us, indeed, that he found nothing here to delay him in his journey, and only adds a flippant reference to the story that here Boadicea was whipped by the Romans—a tradition based on the belief, already referred to, that Maldon was to be identified with Camulodunum. To his allusions to Osea Island I have referred in a former chapter: it is Osea Island and another that lie before you when, entering the town from the direction of Beeleigh Falls, you cross the iron bridge, turn to the left, and, ascending the green hill that slopes to the lime-kiln, look down over the Hythe and the Blackwater. It is Northey Island that lies immediately beneath you; Osea is in the far distance. It contains less than 350 acres of light soil; it has some delightful stretches of shingle-beach, and is rich in attractions for the naturalist. The redshank still haunts Osea in the breeding season, as does the lapwing, but terns and other

sea-birds have sought less harried nesting-grounds. Upon the sea-walls the barley grass flourishes, and sea-campions are conspicuous in their season. The island is now the scene of an experiment of much interest, which I may briefly summarize.

Osea has been recently purchased by a philanthropist whom I need not name. His wish is to found here a colony of inebriates and others, who will be entirely isolated from the mainland, and thus prevented from obtaining intoxicating liquors. The system has been successfully tried in New York Harbour. At Osea there are excellent bathing facilities, and bracing air reaches the islanders from the North Sea. These considerations would alone recommend Osea for this special purpose ; but it has other advantages. Much of the island is good ground in the eyes of the builder ; garden crops yield well in its soil, and under the arrangements which are being perfected it will be practically impossible for intoxicants to be obtained by members of the colony. Mr. C. T. Bateman, who has written of this scheme in ' The World's Work,' tells us that building has already commenced, that a convalescent institution is projected in connection with the Great Assembly Hall Mission, that a general store-shop has been

opened to cope with immediate necessities, and that a steamboat now plies between the island and Maldon. Men of all shades of opinion must surely wish the colony God-speed.

On this hill overlooking the Hythe and the islands of the Blackwater I once chatted with an old sailor who interested me much. Born in Maldon more than seventy years ago, he was until recently a seafarer, but at length retired to 'die in the old place.' He was engaged in the Baltic trade as a young man, and knew the timber wharfs of North Europe far better than those of England. He knew the Mediterranean, too; the Indies, East and West; the West Coast of Africa; the larger trading islands in the South Seas. Muscular rheumatism laid him aside some years ago, but he was recently able to walk up and down before his doorway, or to cross the road to a point commanding a fine view to the north, where he could lean against the railings in the sunshine, exchange the 'time of day' with his acquaintances as they passed, or yarn with such as were willing to yarn with him. He told me that he remembered Maldon before 'they ware'ouses as is everywhere now' were built, and when the view from our vantage-ground wore so different

an aspect that he found it hard to believe he was still in Maldon. He was learned on the subject of Essex 'ager,' which he reckoned he had himself suffered. On the whole, he was low-spirited; he admitted that when indoors he could do little except smoke his pipe in a corner. He was grateful for the packet of tobacco which I gave him at parting, and waved his stick encouragingly as he entered his door.

My way from the hill-top to the Hythe brought me to the ancient Church of St. Mary. Wright records that the tower had formerly a beacon on its summit, which was a mark for ships at sea. That tower became ruinous and fell, doing much damage to the church; the mishap is quaintly mentioned in the brief for repairs granted in the reign of Charles I. 'This of Saint Mary . . . being heertofore very ruynous, hath been repayred by the inhabitants . . . the old worke fell and beate downe part of the body of the church, which the parishioners, to their great cost have since repayred, but finding the ruynes increasing, though themselves bee but of meane ability, and much overcharged with poore, yet they have raysed a rate among themselves to the uttermost of what they can, but come farre short

of the value required for the reparation thereof,' etc. The present tower, with its immense buttresses and upper part of red Tudor brick, looks secure enough, but is not very picturesque. Nor is the interior of the church of much interest, save for the fact that it is unquestionably of Saxon origin, being known as an ecclesiastical property prior to the year 1056. Its ancient graveyard by the waterside contains some quaint inscriptions. Here are two :

'All ye that pass by,
On me cast an eye.
As you are now
So once was I :
As I am now
So you must be
Therefore prepare to follow me.'

'Safe home, safe home in port :
Rent cordage, shattered deck,
Torn sails, provision short,
And only not a wreck.
But oh ! the joy upon the shore,
To tell our voyage perils o'er.'

I have, I think, seen the first inscription ; the second I do not remember having met with before on a tombstone, but it may be found in a well-known hymn-book. 'Only not a wreck.' The

words struck me as applicable to my acquaintance on the hill-top, who was certainly much rent and shattered, and already embarked upon the last of all his voyages. The epitaph is to one Captain William Simpson, and was probably more appropriate than many similar inscriptions. An ancient tomb in the church itself is to the memory of John Fenne, a wool-merchant of the staple of Calais, who died in 1486. Some 'discreet wool-merchants' of Maldon met King Edward III. at York in 1327, to treat with him concerning the profits of their famous industry.

Many of the villages around Maldon should be visited by those who love rambling, not only for its own sake, but for the sake of those literary and historic memories which abound almost everywhere in England. You may ramble northwards to the pleasant village of Great Totham, whose church, conspicuous upon the hillside, may be seen from the higher ground of Maldon, and may there see some ancient barrows where Dane and Saxon are believed to lie side by side 'until the day break and the shadows flee away.' At Totham you may learn something of the village bard who set up his own printing-press, and there printed his well-known ballad in the Essex dialect, 'John Noakes and

Mary Styles; or, An Essex Calf's Visit to Tiptree Races.' Or you may ramble out as far as to Wickham Bishops, near Tiptree Heath, where Philip Morant, the historian of Essex, was once Rector, and where you may still trace the moat that surrounded the old residence of the Bishops of London. Or you may stretch your legs as far as to Tiptree Heath itself, where Boadicea fought the legions of Suetonius, where the black monks had once a priory, and where you may remember a passage in 'Mehalah' which describes how the place was in olden days an auction-ground for smuggled goods. Westwards you may wander as far as to Danbury, where, if the scenery does not delight you, you are hard to please. For you will find a grand old church in the midst of Danbury village, and all about you stretches of wind-swept common-land overlooking many miles of smiling plain. Surely the whole neighbourhood of Danbury is entirely delightful, and those who as yet know it not may turn to the words of 'Julia Cartwright' in No. 5 of the *Essex Review*. Writing of the breezy heath of Lingwood, near to Danbury village, she says: 'Here, on these heathery slopes, where the wild-rose and honeysuckle hang in clusters from the briars, and the ground is carpeted

with sweet-smelling thyme and starry yellow saxifrage, we have one of the loveliest views of Danbury. We see the tall spire of its ancient church rising above the red roofs of the old houses that creep up the hillside, and we look across the heather and bracken at our feet and the rich green meadows beyond, to the woods of Riffham's Chase —the manor owned by Earl Godwin in Saxon times—and the wide plains that stretch far away to Colchester and London.' Or you may pass out of Maldon by way of Spital Road and presently reach Woodham Mortimer, whose ancient Church of St. Margaret, standing in the shadow of a colossal oak, was rebuilt a few years back. In the chancel you will notice a quaint memorial brass, sacred to the memory of a little maiden who lived but three years, one 'Dorothie,' a daughter of Giles Alleine, who died in 1584. The inscription tells you :

> 'A little Impe here buried is,
> Whose soule to Christ is fledd.'

From Woodham Mortimer a short walk will bring you to Purleigh, to which brief reference has already been made in these rambles.

X

A RAMBLE IN COLCHESTER

If you take the train from Witham to Colchester, in the spring of the year, your way will presently lie between banks bright with primroses and snapdragons, in a well-watered pastoral country, pleasantly diversified, and full of the singing of birds. At Kelvedon, where Charles Spurgeon was born, you will cross the bridge that spans the Blackwater; after leaving Marks Tey, where Margaret Catchpole went, you will cross the Colne. Almost immediately, if you look towards the south-east, you will see the ancient town of Colchester covering a distant hill. High over the central buildings soars the Victoria Tower of the town-hall, surmounted by a bronze statue of St. Helena grasping the Holy Cross. 'It is a proper towne,' wrote John Norden, 'walled, and is thowght to have florished in the time of the Romans. . . . The towne standeth upon moste sweete springes, trickelinge from the towne on all sydes.' John

Evelyn, who visited Colchester in 1656, wrote of it as 'a ragged and factious towne, now swarming with sectaries.' Evelyn was too strong a partisan to view contemporary history dispassionately. I have quoted his words as a warning, for in the story of Colchester there is much of civil and religious strife, and of conflicting traditions. He will profit most who can ramble through its streets with a mind free from prejudice, and admire a good deed by whomsoever it is done.

The rambler unacquainted with the history of Colchester—legendary and otherwise—may ask why the town-hall should be thus surmounted by a statue of St. Helena grasping the Holy Cross. To answer that question is to go back in thought many centuries and to review a very interesting if somewhat vague tradition. Most of us, as youngsters in the nursery, learned many scraps of verse which were very dear to us. Among them were those well-known lines about old King Cole who was 'a merry old soul.' I cannot say upon what grounds his temperament is thus described for we certainly know little about him. The story runs that he was a British King, and that he built the first wall round the city of Colchester. They show you his 'kitchen,' probably the site of

a Roman theatre, near the village of Lexden, a short walk from the town. The old chroniclers affirm that while King Cole lived in his stronghold here it was attacked by the Roman general Constantius. The British King made a stout defence, and presently an arrangement was entered into which led to peace and mutual satisfaction. It happened in this wise: King Cole had a daughter of surpassing beauty whose name was Helena, and when Constantius looked upon her he loved her. The old King had no son to succeed him, so gladly bestowed his daughter upon Constantius, and presently journeyed to York and there died. Constantius and Helena shared for awhile the government of Colchester, and a son was born to them who became Constantine the Great. When you go to York you will be told that Helena was born in that city, but if you are an Essex man you will naturally disbelieve it. After the birth of Constantine his father became co-Emperor with Maximian Herculens, and ruled in Gaul and Britain, and was thereupon divorced from Helena in order that he might wed with Theodora, a daughter-in-law of Maximian.

Years passed, and Helena embraced the Chris-

tian faith. She journeyed to the Holy Land, discovered the sepulchre wherein Joseph of Arimathea laid the body of Christ, and the cross upon which He had suffered, and founded a convent for maidens, and other institutions for the furtherance of Christian faith and discipline. The cities of Helenopolis in Lysia and Bithynia owe their names to her, and the men of Colchester have perpetuated her memory by placing her statue upon their loftiest pinnacle. Moreover, her figure is graven upon both the ancient and modern seal of the borough. The story of her origin takes a different complexion at the hands of authoritative writers; St. Ambrose relates that Helena was a *stabularia*, or innkeeper. Every man must decide for himself how far to credit the old chroniclers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth. Many coins have been unearthed which bear her likeness; but this evidence is not very conclusive, for they may relate to another Helena of the family of Constantine. One thing is more certain: Colchester does not derive its name from the Castle of Coel, as some old romancers affirm, but from Colneceaster—*i.e.*, the Castrum on the Colne.

We may doubt whether King Coel—to follow the old spelling—built the walls around Colchester,

but we cannot question their immense antiquity, or deny that hardly any of England's ancient city walls are worthy to be compared with these. Freeman deemed them more perfect than those of York or Lincoln, Exeter or Chester. When last I rambled in Colchester I traced them from point to point—no easy task, for streets and alleys have grown up outside of the old boundaries, and to follow the trend of the wall is like threading a maze. Sometimes I looked between two cottages and saw that the wall terminated their gardens; sometimes it bordered a footpath for some distance without a break. The entire wall forms a rectangle of about two miles, built in regular lines of limestone and Roman brick, and in many places is thickly mantled with ivy and periwinkle, wallflower and flowering nettle, mosses and lichens. A well-preserved section may be seen if, after crossing the bridge over the Colne by the Castle Inn, you turn to the right on reaching Middleborough, and, passing the cattle-market, ascend Balkerne Hill, where the Romans had a fort in those famous days so long ago. On quitting their Colonia at Camulodunum, the Romans left behind them many mementoes of their sojourn, but I

forbear to speak of these relics yet, for we have several places to visit before we enter the museum.

At the summit of Balkerne Hill I came to the ancient Church of St. Mary at the Walls. I should, perhaps, rather describe it as a church of old foundation, for only the lower part of the tower is now ancient. The church suffered much damage during the famous siege—of which more anon—and was largely rebuilt two centuries ago. The west doorway is good Perpendicular, square-headed and ogee-arched. At the west entrance sits the statue of 'John Rebow of Colchester, merchant, dyed the 13 of April, 1699.' The monument was erected by his son, Sir Isaac Rebow, who was knighted by William III., and gave his name to Sir Isaac's Walk, a narrow thoroughfare running parallel with the south side of the town wall, and leading from Head Street to Queen Street. Hardly anything now in the church is of much interest, but we note in passing that Philip Morant, the historian of Essex in general and of Colchester in particular, was once its Rector. I have seen his autograph appended to a catalogue of certain books formerly in the Castle Library—'Phil. Morant 1752': if your rambles should ever take you to Chignal Smealey

you may see it figure many times in the register of the little Tudor Church of St. Nicholas. His great work, 'The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex,' was published in London in 1768, and is a deep mine from which all subsequent writers have drawn their materials. The older editions are now scarce: a good copy in two volumes folio will fetch from £10 to £15. In regard to this book I can mention a curious incident. An old man with whom I chatted in Colchester purchased a number of old volumes at about waste-paper prices. They were thrown together haphazard in a large box, and most of them were worthless. But amongst this rubbish lay a copy of Morant's 'Essex,' in excellent condition. The old man reckoned their share of his price for the whole at 2d.; on the morrow he sold his Morant to a gentleman in Colchester for £4. Surely this was a record deal in second-hand books.

From St. Mary at the Walls I strolled down Sir Isaac's Walk, noticing many quaint houses and courtways and the site of an old postern-gate; then, passing along Stanwell Street, I came to St. John's Green. The neighbourhood teems with historic memories. In a niche of the town-

hall façade stands the burly figure of Eudo Dapifer, leaning on his sword. Eudo was a doughty Norman, who built here at Colchester the famous Abbey of St. John. We may turn to monkish legends for a prelude to the story. I quote from Mr. Beckett's 'Romantic Essex': 'Near the city, on the south side of it, there was a little mound on whose northern slope Sigeric, a priest, had a habitation and a church, constructed of wooden planks, dedicated to St. John the Evangelist. In this church, in the darkness of the night, Divine lights were often seen to flash, and voices were heard praising God, while no one was within.' Other marvels were witnessed in the church, and the spot became so greatly venerated that Eudo Dapifer erected an abbey on its site. The entire Norman building has been long a thing of the past, and the only relic of the abbey now standing is the grand Perpendicular gateway, built of flint, on which you may see the marks of a shell. The abbey was filled with monks of the Benedictine Order; their Abbot wore a mitre and sat in Parliament. Somewhere near the west porch the body of Eudo Dapifer was buried in 1120. The last Abbot, John Beche, met a

violent death. We read that he obstinately refused to relinquish his prerogatives at the bidding of Henry VIII., and there is a tradition that he was only outwitted by a stratagem. He was invited to a feast and then shown the warrant for his death, and hanged immediately. The site of his monastery was given to Sir Thomas D'Arcy of St. Osyth. The ground on which it stood is close to St. John's Green ; it is now Government property, and as I lingered outside the old gateway a number of soldiers were busy with pickaxe and shovel, mending the approach from Stanwell Street. The gateway has been restored, and the exterior shows no sign of age ; but its design remains unaltered—the square-headed windows over each niche, the corner turrets with crocketed pinnacles. From the gateway of St. John's Abbey I turned to larger and still more interesting monastic remains—to the Priory Church of St. Botolph, or, as old Norden spells it, 'St. Buttolfes in Buttolfe Streete.'

These fine ruins stand in the angle formed by Priory Road and St. Botolph Street, just outside of the old Roman wall, and close to where formerly stood St. Botolph's Gate. They are

very noble, even in desolation, as you may see from the frontispiece to this volume, and afford some idea of the grandeur of the whole before the monks had deserted it or the cannon of Fairfax had played upon it from the south. Passing round the modern Church of St. Botolph—in which an attempt was made to follow the architecture of the older structure—I found myself before the Norman doorway of the western front. Its arch is deeply recessed ; above it are two rows of interlacing arches, so designed as to form pointed arches at their intersections ; they are built of Roman brick. The central doorway itself is of surpassing beauty, and the Roman bricks which flank it on either side, and which mark its perfect outer semicircle, are in excellent preservation. The smaller arch on its left fell long ago ; that on the right still stands. Far above, over the second row of interlacing arches, I could still trace half the circumference of the large circular window, now crumbling to decay. Within, a stretch of greensward covers some graves ; on either hand are huge round columns, which once marked the nave and aisles ; ivy, its immense stems witnessing to its age, clings to the remaining masonry of the

aisle. On the left much of the nave arcade still stands. The whole ruins are wonderfully soft in appearance, as though Father Time had dealt lovingly with them, in sorrow lest his should be the hand to bring them to the ground at last. The wren sings loudly from his perch among the ivy ; the robin haunts these ruins, too ; sometimes a butterfly flutters here and there in the roofless nave. There are few finer ruins in South-East England. I am told that the disposition of the arches above the western doorway is almost unique. Of the priory itself no ruins remain. Its first Prior was a monk named Ernulph (*circa* A.D. 1100) ; it was pre-eminent over all Augustinian monasteries in England, as we learn from a Bull of Pope Pascal II.

The Church of St. Giles stands between these two monastic sites. It is an old building sadly needing restoration, with brick floor and high pews, and a gallery at the west end. Many pilgrims find their way here, for this church contains the bones of two brave Englishmen—Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle, Knights. On a large slab of marble in the nave the following inscription is deeply incised :

VNDER THIS
MARBLE LY THE
BODIES OF THE
TWO MOST VALI
ANT CAPTAINS
S^r CHARLES
LVCAS AND S^r
GEORGE LISLE
KNIGHTS, WHO
FOR THEIR EMI
NENT LOYALTY
TO THEIR SOVE
RAIN WERE ON
THE 28th DAY OF AV
GVST, 1648, BY THE
COMMAND OF S^r
THOMAS FAIR
FAX, THEN GENE
RAL OF THE PAR
LIAMENT ARMY,
IN COLD BLOOD BARBA
ROUSLY MVRDERED.

We can hardly read these words with indifference, whether our sympathies are with Cavalier or Roundhead, Tory or Whig, Conservative or Liberal. To look down upon that old stone is to go back in thought to that evening in August, 1648, when those two brave men were led from the castle gate to the greensward on its northern side. For seventy-six days they had

made a right gallant defence of their citadel, and had quitted them like men, but were compelled at length to surrender. Life must have been a very precious possession to those English men of action, but they met the hour of death without flinching. They doubted not that their Sovereign was by Divine Right appointed to govern England as he pleased, and they counted it gain to die 'for God and King.' We read that three files of musketry were drawn up upon the spot. 'I am ready for you,' said Lucas; 'and now, rebels, do your worst.' Before his dead body was removed Lisle was brought forward; he kissed the body of his old friend, gave gold for distribution among his executioners, and offered a short prayer. Thinking the musketeers placed at too great a distance, he asked them to come a little nearer. 'I'll warrant you, sir, we'll hit you,' exclaimed one. Lisle answered: 'I have been nearer you, friends, when you have missed me.' The two bodies were buried together in this grave, in the vault of the Lucas family. When Defoe visited Colchester, he met with the tradition that no grass grew henceforth on the ground where that blood was shed; he does not, however, seem to have visited the spot, for he says that the story 'is now dropped,

and the grass, I suppose, grows there as in other places.' I went straight to the scene of the execution after leaving St. Giles's Church. It is now a public resort of smooth-shaven lawns and gravel pathways. A stone has been erected to mark the spot where Lucas and Lisle fell, near the limes that throw a chequered shade across the greensward. The castle still frowns down upon you as it did upon that tragedy 250 years ago, and 'where the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall' the jackdaws hover and chatter as they doubtless did in the terrible days of the siege. I may here mention a discovery recently made near this spot. Beneath a mound some workmen came upon the remains of several human bodies, standing upright and close together; the skeletons varied in size, and were thought to be those of a family of martyred Protestants, many of whom were imprisoned in the castle during the Marian persecutions.

Thinking of these strange leaves in the book of history, I turned to the castle itself and to the many treasures which it contains. Camden wrote that Colchester Castle was in his day ready to fall with age; more than a century later Defoe referred to Camden's words, and added that 'it is not fallen

yet, nor will another hundred and twenty years, I believe, make it look one jot the older.' Defoe hit the truth more nearly than many prophets: almost two centuries have passed since he penned that prediction, and much of the fabric still stands. According to the guide-books, it is the largest Norman keep in England. The question when and by whom it was first built is not readily answered, if we may judge from the diverse opinions expressed by those who have studied the subject more or less exhaustively. The material of which it is built is partly Roman; the design of the ruined structure is largely Norman. Some local antiquaries have pronounced it to be the temple mentioned by Tacitus as erected to the memory of Claudius Cæsar at Camulodunum, but, on the whole, modern opinion, supported by Freeman, regards the structure as a Norman castle. Its builder is thought to have been Eudo Dapifer, already mentioned in this chapter, and you may amuse yourself by supposing it to occupy the site of the Temple of Claudius or of King Coel's palace, according to your beliefs in matters of legendary lore.

The custodian of the castle can still show you much of genuine interest. Entering at the Norman

gateway, I ascended the broad staircase, and was shown a large room now filled with an excellent private library, but formerly containing the famous collection of books which Samuel Harsnett presented to his native town of Colchester. The name is one which I cannot pass without comment.

Samuel Harsnett—whose statue, in archiepiscopal robes, stands in a niche in the façade of the town-hall—was born in St. Botolph Street and baptized in the Church of St. Botolph, Colchester, in 1561. He was the son of a baker. In 1576 he entered as a sizar at King's College, Cambridge, from whence he removed to Pembroke Hall. He took Holy Orders and became a zealous theologian and Churchman. We read that he once preached at St. Paul's Cross against predestination, and handled his theme so energetically that many deemed him a Papist at heart, and Whitgift ordered him to preach no more on that topic. He became—like Samuel Parr many years later—Master of the Free School at Colchester. He was not, however, enamoured of his task, and he soon relinquished the instruction of youth and returned to his studies in divinity at Pembroke Hall. The livings and preferments which he enjoyed are too numerous to mention; he became chaplain to

Bancroft (then Bishop of London), Vicar of Chigwell, Archdeacon of Essex, Rector of Shenfield, Master of Pembroke Hall—succeeding the famous divine, Lancelot Andrewes—Vicar of Hutton, Rector of Stisted, Bishop of Chichester, Bishop of Norwich, Archbishop of York. There lived in Harsnett's day one John Darrel (1562-1602), for some time a farmer and preacher at Ashby-de-la-Zouch. Darrel put it abroad that he had cast out a wicked spirit from a Derbyshire woman named Catherine Wright, and it became known that he was further associated with other exorcisms. In those days it was dangerous to appear possessed of supernatural powers; a commission was appointed to examine the case of so potent an exorcist, and Harsnett was one of its members. Darrel was condemned and thrown into prison, but his subsequent fate is not known. In 1599 there was published in London a volume entitled 'A Discovery of the Fraudulent Practises of John Darrel, Bachelor of Artes . . . of casting out Devils.' The author of this edifying work was Harsnett, and in 1603, by command of the Privy Council, he wrote a book, similar in character, against a Jesuit named Edmund (Weston?), who also claimed to have cast out evil spirits. Harsnett, in point

of fact, seems to have strangely oscillated between credulity and scepticism; he was notorious for his love of High Church dogma and ritual, his antipathy to non-priestly exorcism, and his zeal for the suppression of 'conventicles.' It was Laud who recommended him for archiepiscopal rank, as one likely to set the House of God in order. He must have found his task no light one, for at that time the Church was 'infested with the men of Dan and Bethel, whose hearts were over-seas'—and he wished their bodies with them. Harsnett died in 1631, at Moreton in the Marsh, but was buried in the ancient Church of St. Mary at Chigwell. In the chancel you may still see the fine brass to his memory, almost life-size; it shows his effigy vested in episcopal robes of the Ornaments Rubric—cope, alb, dalmatic, and stole. 'We may be sure,' writes the Rev. C. Arthur Lane, 'that Harsnett wore his cope when officiating at the Eucharist.' I do not doubt the assumption for one moment.

The Harsnett Library was recently removed from the castle to the town-hall, where you may inspect its treasures by permission of the librarian. The private collection now at the castle is rich in topographical literature, but the

removal of the older library robs it of much of its interest. You will be wise if you lose no time before turning to the museum. It is exceedingly rich in Roman relics, most of which were found in the neighbourhood. Mr. Henry James might have penned at Colchester what he wrote at Avignon: 'A great many small objects have been found in its soil—pottery, glass, bronzes, lamps, vessels, and ornaments of gold and silver. . . . These diminutive, intimate things bring one near to the old Roman life; they seem like pearls strung upon the slender thread that swings across the gulf of time. A little glass cup that Roman lips have touched says more to us than the great vessel of an arena.' The beautiful vase of Romano-British glass is perhaps as perfect as any in England; you will notice, too, the *poculum*, or wine-cup, of a slatish hue, with scroll ornamentation in white, and the words VINCO TE in bold capitals around the shoulder. Here, too, are glass cinerary urns, still holding the burnt ashes of somebody's darling; rough dice with which the Roman gambled for sesterces; glass unguentaria, often found where the Roman laid his dead; figures in terra-cotta and glass, of animals of uncouth exterior; beads and bracelets of quaint

design; a huge amphora, found near the castle, and a Roman helmet from the neighbourhood of St. Albans; coins of Constantius Chlorus, Helena, Constantine, Cunobeline, Claudius, and many others. Two greater treasures I must at least mention. Just as you enter the doorway you will notice the sepulchral monument of a Roman centurion, discovered near Colchester in 1868. The inscription tells you that Verecundus and Novicius, two freed men, placed this to the memory of Marcus Favonius, of the tribe of Pollia. So, at least, states the Guide, which you may buy for sixpence in the town, an interesting and accurate little book, which I do not hesitate to quote, especially as I was too indolent to copy the inscription for myself. The second treasure is known as the Colchester Sphinx; it fronts you on its pedestal as you step from the corridor into the larger apartment. It was discovered about 1820, while the foundations were being dug for the hospital in Lexden Road. The face is much battered, but the wings are in excellent preservation; the breasts and arms are well proportioned, and the head of its victim, over which it is said to 'gloat,' is strongly sculptured. A few steps near the Sphinx lead down to a smaller

room, containing—*inter alia*—a good collection of books relating to the history, antiquities, and natural features of Essex.

I hardly know what to write touching Colchester Castle itself, although I have spent some hours within its precincts—hours which I am little likely to forget, for they evoked some very precious memories. I found, to my no small pleasure, that the old custodian was born at Preston in Hertfordshire, and when he learned that I knew his native village, and had written of it, he was pleased too. He laid himself out right willingly for my entertainment. He led me to the top of the wide, winding staircase, and out upon the summit of the ruined wall, whence we looked down upon the huge quadrangle below, and saw the rare 'herring-bone' Roman tilework running from north to south in the eastern wall. At the north-west corner we passed under a doorway and found ourselves in a tiny chamber where James Parnell, a Quaker, was immured, and where, as tradition states, his keepers treated him so harshly that he died. This, I believe, was in 1655. Two years before Parnell, then only about seventeen years of age, had visited George Fox, in prison for conscience' sake at Carlisle, and the experience

doubtless strengthened him during his own trials. In Colchester, as, indeed, elsewhere, the Quakers suffered much persecution. Five years after Parnell's death, as Thomas Ellwood relates, a grocer of Colchester was seized by a troop of soldiers at a meeting in the house of Isaac Penington at Chalfont, but was released by Sir William Boyer of Denham, on the grounds that he had merely sought the acquaintance of Penington, whom he had never seen before. I thought of this incident as I glanced round the prison of the less fortunate Parnell, and wondered what tortures he had endured. He may have been literally 'done to death.' Sewell, in his 'History of the Quakers,' tells how the gaolers of this ill-used people sometimes flogged the women under their charge with whips, and, as we know from the testimony of Ellwood, men were treated no better, as persecuted Quakers, in the olden times.

From the summit of the walls we went below to the dungeons, which we reached through a doorway in the wall that divides the quadrangle. Those dungeons were formerly used as a common gaol, and are known to have been as the portal of death to many a Protestant in the days of Queen Mary. I saw the enormous keys that

assured their safe-keeping, the huge irons with which they were shackled, the rings in the wall that held them fast, and the barred grating which hardly admitted the light of day. What stories of cruelty practised in the name of God those old walls could tell! So long ago as the year 1428, a tailor of Colchester named William Chivelyng was burnt for his religious opinions before the tower of 'Colking's Castle,' as we learn from the local Red Paper Book, and of the seventeen persons burnt in Colchester under the Marian persecutions, several are known to have suffered in the castle bailey; you may see their names recorded on the Martyrs' Memorial in the town-hall. As Byron puts it,

> 'Christians have burnt each other, quite persuaded
> All the Apostles would have done as they did.'

Perhaps the most striking feature of our English castle ruins is the immense thickness of their walls; the mere labour involved in bringing materials to the spot must have been very great. This wonder has confronted me at Pevensey, Narberth, Tenby, Manorbier, Lewes, Carisbrook, Berkhampstead, and at other places, but nowhere more strongly than at Colchester, where the

custodian will tell you that the walls are 30 feet thick at their foundations! We are apt to marvel at this lavish use of material until we remember that the castle could only be held so long as it could be defended — the only law recognised was that of the strong arm. Here the castle could be defended very successfully. Defoe printed a 'Diary of the Siege and Blockade of Colchester,' 'from so good a hand that I have no reason to question its being a true relation,' which states that the cannon-balls made very little impression upon the castle, and that the besiegers ceased firing at its walls, especially as the townsmen made but little defensive use of it. I saw a good section of the wall by peering through a 'window' in the quadrangle, and could realize that such masonry, like the old three-decker man-of-war, might be heavily pounded without sustaining irreparable damage.

I cannot say there are many traces of the siege of Colchester visible as you walk its streets. The Priory Church of St. Botolph, as we have seen, suffered much damage; but most edifices then standing have been long since pulled down, and although I learned that here was once a fine doorway, and there a finer tower, I found it hard to

remember the siege for many minutes together, especially in the wide High Street, so thoroughly typical of a flourishing English town. Nor is there much of old habit or antiquated opinion. On the contrary, I was reminded, at every turn, how everything changes with the times. I lunched at a new house near North Hill. The day, despite the season, was very warm. Several commercial travellers talked incessantly on unedifying topics; an old lady, my *vis-à-vis*, contrived, with admirable pertinacity, to write several letters and toy with her cutlet at the same time; an old gentleman entered hastily and despatched an excellent lunch in a quarter of an hour; a waitress, careful and troubled about many things, so nearly overturned a loaded tray that I thought of an incident in Paul de Kock. It was all very modern.

One morning I found myself in Colchester with some hours to spare, so I rambled eastwards towards the Hythe, where Sir William Gull was born in 1816. Coming presently to St. Leonard's Church, I heard a story which is worth repeating. In the tower are preserved five quaint figures; they were formerly with several others upon the hammer-beams of the oaken nave roof. Many

years ago, as the story runs, four robbers came to the church stealthily by night, eager to appropriate the Sacramental plate. They were caught in the act, and it was decided to punish them in such a way as to deter others from imitating their designs upon the House of God. They were thrust into the chamber above the porch, and left to starve. Now, a certain baker, when he knew of their plight, brought a loaf of bread and threw it into the chamber for their relief. But the clergy, when they heard of this merciful act, were very angry, and laying hands upon the baker, they thrust him in with the robbers, to share the same fate. After many days of suffering the men died, and, lo! their bodies became at length like five pieces of wood or stone. So the folks of St. Leonard's took care of those wondrous relics and placed them in their church. I wonder they were not exhibited as efficacious charms; for miraculous healings have often been attributed to less worthy instruments. We are rather more sure of our ground when we glance once again at the days of the siege; for we know that an early attack was made upon this quarter of the town, that many inhabitants took refuge in the church, and that others fired upon the Parliamentarians from the

roof and tower. They show you some beautiful windows in the church, and tell you that the tower was badly shaken by the earthquake of 1884.

I turned from that strange legend to a small building close by, which reminded me of a far different story. On the south side of Artillery Street stand some iron gates, and beyond them a broad gravel walk leads to the Primitive Methodist Chapel, erected in 1839 and restored in 1892—a plain structure of red brick, wholly without adornment, but hallowed in the eyes of Essex Nonconformists; for here, as he himself records, came Charles Spurgeon as a boy, troubled concerning his soul's salvation, 'seeking rest and finding none.' As it chanced, the discourse was upon the words, 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else.' The lad was enlightened and comforted by the sermon, and, like Bunyan's Christian, went on his way rejoicing. He lived to preach thousands of sermons and to write scores of books; scattered here and there in his writings are many interesting anecdotes of village parsons and eccentric folk who dwelt in Essex, but it is hardly my duty to recall them here. Instead, I may refer briefly to another

celebrated man who once fought a great battle in Colchester—Richard Cobden. The story is referred to by Mr. John Morley in his masterly biography of the great champion of Free Trade. It was in the days of the Anti-Corn-Law League, when every member for Essex was a Tory. The Essex parsons had fulminated loudly against the proposals of Cobden, and excitement ran high in Colchester. A huge meeting was convened, hustings were erected, and Cobden and Villiers urged their arguments with convincing logic. Sir John Tyrrell, a stalwart henchman of Peel, did his best to oppose them, but after a wordy strife, lasting six hours, Sir John 'was found to have silently vanished.' During the debate, however, he had challenged Cobden to again argue the matter with him at Chelmsford. Thither Cobden went on the appointed day, but Sir John, who doubtless thought discretion the better part of valour, did not appear.

On reaching at length the Hythe quay, I found myself beside the tidal Colne. The Colne has less than forty miles to run from source to sea. It rises near hilly Birdbrook, a pleasant village, where you are told about Martha Blewitt, who kept the Swan Inn there in the seventeenth century, and

married nine husbands successively! Even at the Hythe, ten miles from Brightlingsea, the Colne is but just wide enough for barges to pass up and down. The Hythe at Colchester, if it differs from any other Hythe, does so by virtue of its being exclusively devoted to the interest of barges and bargees. At Maldon, for instance, many sorts of craft are constantly in view; at Colchester you will see nothing more picturesque than a barge. On the quayside stand corn warehouses and coal-yards; the rattle of machinery rushes out upon you from the great oil-mills; cranes clank incessantly as the barges are loaded with oil-cake or with casks of linseed-oil. On the other side of the quay stand stacks of timber; farther down the river, in the direction of Wyvenhoe, the east bank rises to a thickly-wooded slope, marked here and there by clumps of yellow furze. I found it very pleasant between the Hythe and Rowhedge, where I whiled away an hour by the riverside, watching the swallows hawking over the water, and listening to a blackbird that sang in the long thicket. Before dusk I was among the yachts in Rowhedge, bound for Wyvenhoe and Brightlingsea.

XI

BESIDE THE TIDAL COLNE

I HAVE Stevenson on my side when I say that to hang about harbours is to enjoy the richest form of idling. It is not that I am partial to large harbours or docks. I have in my mind the little yachting harbours and fishing-quays of our river estuaries rather than such places as Portsmouth or even Ramsgate. When, after my last ramble in Colchester, I approached Rowhedge from the north, I felt that I had reached a delightful haven of refuge, a little waterside village where, even nowadays, I might lay aside conventionality, keep my own hours, and order my own goings-out and comings-in. I liked the place at a distance, and liked it better on a closer acquaintance. From the low grazing pastures beside the Colne the fishing-village of Rowhedge lies before you very compactly; at a distance you would hardly guess that it boasts its ship-building yards, malting-houses, and brewery. Your eye will

at once fasten upon the odd-looking octagonal Church of St. Lawrence, and if you consult your Durrant, as all good Essex ramblers do, you will learn that it was erected, in 1838, in imitation of the chapter-house of York Minster. Such being the case, you will forbear to inspect it, for, like most ramblers, you probably plead guilty to an ineradicable tendency to admire only what is ancient or romantic or picturesque.

Rowhedge is not without its charms of aspect and situation. As you approach, following the west bank of the Colne, there lies on your right a flat country, half marsh, half meadow, where lapwings rise suddenly to their erratic manœuvres and skylarks gladden the whole plain with their music. On your left, if the tide be flowing, you may see barges, piled high with timber, moving slowly up the river to the Hythe. Presently the river widens, and when you reach the foreshore at Rowhedge the town of Wyvenhoe lies before you on the opposite bank. To the south-east the Colne widens still more as it approaches Brightlingsea, its waters everywhere studded with sailing craft and haunted by sea-gulls and terns.

Rowhedge, as I have hinted, is not conventional. It has, I suppose, considerable claims to respect-

ability, for it is a member of the Cinque Port of Sandwich. It reminded me—I don't quite know why—of Thoreau's remarks about Cranberry Island. The village is so near to London, and yet, as Thoreau puts in, 'I never voyaged so far in all my days.' I talked with men grown gray in such pursuits as 'they who sit in parlours never dream of . . . men fuller of talk and rare adventure in the sun and wind and rain than a chestnut is of meat . . . greater men than Homer or Chaucer or Shakespeare, only they never got time to say so —they never took to the way of writing.' Men whose business takes them upon the sea in little ships are perpetually in danger, and each has his memories of perilous voyages and unpleasant incidents. Such men are more reticent about themselves than you might suppose. I have, indeed, remarked that they are full of talk ; but I found it difficult to entice them into the confessional. I found, on the contrary, that however loquacious they waxed over things in general, they were unwilling to talk of their own lives. I passed some time at Rowhedge, especially among the yachts on the foreshore, admiring the beauty of their lines and their spick-and-span condition. The streets, too, had a

singular fascination for me. To speak by the card, I ought, perhaps, to say that the village consists of two or three streets and a few tiny courtyards; but small as it is, it exhibits many odd specimens of old and new cottage architecture. Some tiny homes which I saw would excite much wonder if suddenly set down in towns which I could name.

About a mile to the south of Rowhedge stands Fingringhoe, a small village set upon a hill. Here, as at many places on the Essex coast, you learn that the church suffered damage by the earthquake of 1884. The parish—so pleasantly situated, with extensive views over the Colne Valley—is believed to have belonged to the Abbey of St. Ouen, in Normandy, under a charter of Edward the Confessor; Wright mentions that it was called Fyngeringho, Fynrgynghoo, and Fingrithe. The same historian has a footnote referring to quaint laws and customs which obtained hereabouts in olden times. In 1520 a Court was held at Petehall and West Mersey, on the Tuesday after Whitsuntide; it was presided over by Thomas Bonham, Esquire, Steward to King Henry VIII., and William Pirton, Esquire, bailiff of the manors. At this Court a 'customary' relating to Fingringhoe and some adjacent

parishes was drawn up, a draught of which was taken in 1572 by a surveyor named Thomas Camock. By this 'customary' it was appointed that 'the lords are to have all manner of advantages of the Admiralty of the sea within the towns of West Mersey, Fingrinhoe, and Petehall; and the finder of the said wreck to have half thereof, or the like advantage, after the use of the admiral court. The lord or his farmer must keep a common bull, or boar. The eldest daughter succeeds to copyhold estates, not partable.' This in passing, to beguile the road; for at Fingringhoe there is little to detain an itinerant archæologist or artist, excepting some old brasses, several frescoes and an ancient oaken chest in St. Andrew's Church. The old farmhouse near by, known as Fingringhoe Hall, was formerly a moated residence; it was sketched by Mr. Barrett in 1891. Fronted by Elizabethan gables, and partly crenellated, it presents a typical relic of the past, soon to go the way of many another manor-house in England.

From the Ship at Rowhedge the ferryman, for one halfpenny, put me across the Colne to Wyvenhoe. A drizzling rain fell as I landed, and did so throughout much of the day, sadly interfering with my rambles. Here, also, beside the

quay, are yards for the building of ships, yachts and small boats, and every second man you meet is a yachtsman or fisherman, and wears a jersey or a peak-cap, or both. I sought shelter from wind and rain at an inn near the church, where I listened, in a pleasant bar-parlour, to many a yarn touching the smuggling days, of which more anon. Old, weather-beaten men sat shoulder to shoulder, their backs against the almanacs on the wall, their clay pipes nodding as they talked. On the wall, too, hung some choice lines strongly recommending the house for the purposes of refreshment :

> 'I have travelled Far and Near,
> to find a Pot of good strong Beer
> And at Last I Found it here.'

Our talk drifted at length into many channels, and I heard sufficient about Mersea Island to whet my appetite for a visit. But the main topics at Wyvenhoe concern the seafaring life, and to that, after each trivial excursus, we invariably returned. And I have since found that researches into the history of Wyvenhoe lead to much the same result. From the State Papers we gather that the ship-building industry in this town is very ancient. Mention is made of the *Sunflower* of Wyvenhoe, bound for Scarborough with muskets, rapiers and

belts for Sir Hugh Cholmley, Governor of that town. The cargo is referred to in a letter, written from Dunkirk by William Sandys, asking that the freight may be paid within three days to Giles Wiggoner, master for the voyage. We read, too, of a ship-builder of Wyvenhoe named Robert Pardy, who, at a certain stage in the building of a vessel, writes to ask for part payment, as had been agreed. This was in 1654-55. Shortly afterwards several ketches were built at Wyvenhoe; one, the *Hind*, was manned with difficulty, there being at the time a scarcity of hands. Later, boats from Wyvenhoe were commissioned to ply between Kent and Suffolk, thereby frustrating the light pirates of Ostend, who had boldly sailed up the Colne and stolen such small craft as came in their way. In 1667 the trawlers of Wyvenhoe came home with alarming reports to the effect that many scores of Dutch ships were off the Nore! Happily, their reports were greatly exaggerated, and it was presently known that there were but 'twelve or fourteen sail.' The gist of these incidents, and of some others, is narrated in a local guide by Mr. Barrett, who also provides a dainty little sketch of the craft upon the Colne at Wyvenhoe.

As by duty bound, I went to the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, a Perpendicular structure much restored. Over the entrance arch of the north porch I noticed a panel, filled with a remarkably realistic carving of the Miraculous Draught of Fishes. The subject is appropriately placed, and should appeal strongly to the men and women of this fishing-town. The figures of those Galilean peasants, and the water around them, are strongly relieved; the panel must have had considerable merit when fresh from the sculptor's hand. Within the church, as at Fingringhoe, are several old brasses; one is to Sir Thomas Westeley (1535), chaplain to the Countess of Oxford, the effigy holding a chalice; another is to Lady Elizabeth Scroope (1537), with mantle and coronet, the canopy sadly mutilated. On the nave roof the bosses of the arched ribs are carved to represent the heads of Christ and the Twelve Apostles.

I took the train from Wyvenhoe in the afternoon, and was soon at Brightlingsea, a small town described by Mr. Ward as 'odoriferous in its business quarter and possessed of no attractions whatever to the tourist.' I must confess that I can hardly quarrel with this dictum; the town

certainly looks better from Mersea Stone or from the hill near St. Osyth than at close quarters. There is the usual quayside activity alternating with inactivity, as boats come and go; and you can chat with fisherfolk and yachtsmen, or with those mysterious loungers in open spaces who seem to live by standing about with their hands in their pockets. Moreover, you may support local industries by hiring a boat to take you across to Mersea Island, or to the opposite promontory; or by purchasing oysters at the stalls upon the Hard.

Nor is the town without interest if you investigate its history. It was given by William the Conqueror to Eudo Dapifer, who in turn bestowed it upon the Abbey of St. John at Colchester. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries it passed into the rapacious hands of Thomas Cromwell, who held it for a brief while only. Not so long ago the town almost subsisted by its trade in oysters; but the recent scare has had disastrous effects and has spelt ruin to many. It is still a busy centre for yachtsmen. When Mr. Beckett visited Brightlingsea some years ago, he looked into an inn and saw 'two or three dozen men drinking and smoking in

philosophic contentment.' The seafarer, he adds, predominated, and contributed to the conversation such racy talk as usually falls from his lips.

Eleven years ago Mr. Barrett sketched a portion of an old turreted house at Brightlingsea. I had wished to see this quaint structure, but during my brief visit was unable to find it. It is described as a small house, consisting only of ground-floor and attic, with steeply sloping tiled roof and dormer-windows. Its turret stair, with tiny window and 'extinguisher' roof, is certainly an unusual feature even in a large manor-house; attached to so small a structure it is perhaps almost unique. Far more conspicuous is the tower of All Saints' Church, which occupies a prominent position some distance from the town, and is an important landmark to those at sea. From ground to pinnacle it rises nearly a hundred feet, and is strongly buttressed. It contains, or did contain, only one bell. The belfry was recently the scene of the re-election of the deputy Mayor of the town—an ancient local ceremony. The 'jurats,' or freemen of the town, are present at the ceremony by privilege. This freedom of the town is purchased for eleven pence, provided the applicant has resided in Brightlingsea for a

year and a day ; I am told that it carries exemption from jury service in Essex.

The church itself should not be overlooked, for it can show some good work. The south porch is very noticeable, richly decorated in two bands—the lower of trefoil decorated panels, the upper of panels also, with deeply relieved trefoil ornamentation. There is a mutilated statue in one of the crocketed niches in the south chapel, and the carved oak bosses in the nave are distinctly good. There are several brasses, particularly an imperfect one on the nave floor, but none of them are of historic importance. Indeed, a fact which strikes one rather forcibly in the neighbourhood is the poverty of its biographical associations, literary or otherwise. Very few eminent writers or Churchmen have been connected with the extreme east of Essex, and I think I may assert that hardly anybody born in the neighbourhood of this present ramble now occupies a niche in that magnificent Pantheon—the 'Dictionary of National Biography.' I do not say this to the disparagement of the men of Essex. Most of the worthiest deeds are unrecorded, and many of those who bulk largest in the world's history were not persons with whom one would willingly have lived.

XII

BURNHAM-ON-CROUCH

One autumn, very early in the morning, I took the train from Southend to Wickford. The fog had hardly dispersed, but hung in wisps about hedge and coppice, as though reluctant to dissolve. Autumn had already laid a 'fiery finger on the leaves.' The dwarf oaks on the railroad banks looked russet brown ; the leaves on the birch-trees were already dead ; from the willows they had dropped. But the mist dispersed with surprising suddenness ; and from the higher land, as we approached Rayleigh, I looked down upon the subjacent country, clear to the horizon.

Autumn has never lacked admirers. Trees have grown oracular in many lands, and poets have sung the praises of their own Dodona grove as the year waned—for the most part with other notes than to the Orphean lyre. The silence that broods over the woods when leaves are reddening to the fall had incomparable charms for Chateau-

briand and Bernardin St. Pierre, as for many other writers in prose or verse. Small wonder, perhaps, that such choice spirits fall in love with Autumn, for she is worthy to be loved. She is tender and gracious and kind. Miss Spring so often has us at her mercy, and there is no anticipating her behaviour; but Autumn is quiet and modest beyond any of her sister seasons. She is the pink of politeness, and in the matter of dress is *sans reproche*. Nor does she repent of her good intentions, or nip her generosities in the bud, as Miss Spring is wont to do. On the contrary, she gives graciously to the evil and unthankful as to the worthy, and hers is that liberality which we acknowledge at the harvest-home.

I know a brook hereabouts that babbles and prattles over its pebbly bed as, half choked with fallen leaves from overhanging willows, 'it makes sweet music with the enamelled stones.' It meanders through yonder valley until it reaches a stretch of lush meadow-land where cows are cropping the aftermath; then, turning northwards, it broadens considerably as it passes a few cottages. Thence it loiters between its banks with hardly perceptible current; so sluggish is it at times that it well reflects the willows on its banks. In the

evening, when the mists gather once again in the valley, you may see that 'pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream' of which Shelley writes in his beautiful 'Adonais.'

At Wickford I had three hours to wait for a train to Burnham-on-Crouch, or, as the Essex peasant calls it, Barn'um. So I rambled through the village, noticing the unusual variety of its cottage architecture. Here was a red-brick house closely mantled with ivy and Virginia creeper; here were cottages entirely faced with boards, their red-tiled roofs covered with lichens; near by stood one with thatched roof and deep dormer-windows, with many pigeons cooing about its chimney-stack; opposite, a single-storied cottage, long and low, seemed in imminent danger of collapse. The morning was still young, and men were passing up and down the street bearing pails of water from the village pump near the bridge. When I sought refreshment at a wayside inn, I listened, over a fragrant and welcome pipe, to a conversation between three Essex men, enunciated with so broad an accent that I will answer for it no London lady would have comprehended a single sentence. I had mentioned the recent heavy rains, and found that farmers at Wickford had

suffered severely. 'Yes, it's bin shock'n weather most ever wer out this w'y. Land's all soppy-like. W'y! I know a farm wer nigh on seven acres o' hy arn't worth cuttin' on. T'ditches be most full o' water, an' w'en yer get on t'field an' plo' on't op, t'forrers fills op wi' water most as fast as you plo' em. 'Tain't no good plo'n on 'em 'tall, so theer! An' wate's bin most 's bad 's hy—all spoiled an' soppy-like wi' t'wet, long 'fore t'arvust. Lor! all they ots, too, wot I see rot'n—acres an' acres on 'em, spoiled wi' water an' beat down flat 's yer 'and.' I transcribe these sentences from verbatim notes, taken on the spot, only adapting such spelling as seems to best reproduce the local pronunciation.

The railroad from Wickford to Burnham traverses a very pleasant open country, largely pastoral in its interests and industries, and certainly not devoid of bucolic charm. It carries you to Battlesbridge, where an iron bridge spans the Crouch near the old water-mill, and where, as tradition states, fugitive warriors crossed the river after the Battle of Ashingdon. Next you reach Woodham Ferris, where Maurice Fitz-Geoffrey founded a priory for Black Canons at Bycknacre, in the days of our second Henry; a Transitional

arch, standing in solitary desolation among the corn, was recently—perhaps it yet stands—the sole relic of that once rich foundation. The curious may find an illustration of this arch, and much interesting letterpress touching the priory, in *Archæologia* (1793). Another three miles takes you to Fambridge, whither we have already rambled; then, looking southwards from the train window, you will survey a wide stretch of perfectly flat marshland, scribbled over with winding creeks and narrow dykes, spanned by many little bridges. Presently you will catch glimpses of the white sails of yachts and the masts of barges in the far distance, afloat upon the broader waters of the Crouch Estuary. Althorne is soon passed, and the next station is Burnham-on-Crouch—the 'Burneham streete' of John Norden's map.

Burnham, as a friend who loves it well once told me, is wholly given up to oyster-culture, fishing, boating, and boat-building. The general truth of this statement is apparent as you walk from the station to the quay. You pass the Oyster-Smack as you go down the hill, and advertisements show that you may hire boats of any rig or cut, for pleasure or profit—from a spanking yacht to a centre-board dinghy or a

rowing-gig. Passing the boat-building yard and the old wreck of a windmill near the foreshore, you will reach the quay. Here is one long litter of old spars and anchors and windlasses; boats are upon the slips in all stages of repair or construction; barges are getting under way for Maldon or Rochester or elsewhere; a ketch, perhaps, lies close up to the quayside; the water is literally covered with craft—yawl, cutter, steam-launch, motor-boat, yacht, and schooner. This aspect of marine medley is fascinating in the eyes of many. I know a man who year after year comes here to spend his summer holiday. He enjoys his share of this world's wealth, and could travel farther if he pleased; but he never wearies of the quiet attractions of Burnham. He loves to chat with the old men of this little waterside town, who have been boatmen all their lives—loves, too, his boating trips up and down the Crouch, which he considers a fine waterway for all purposes of pleasure. The town itself has grown much of late, and several streets are composed entirely of new houses, most of which are very small. The main thoroughfare, running east and west, is unusually wide, and lined with trees; on its south side stands an octagonal clock-tower,

built in 1877. The town is ministered to by men of many sects and diverse 'persuasions.' The Salvation Army is here, nearly opposite the clock-tower; close by are the Congregationalists, nor are Baptists lacking. At the extreme east end of the town I found myself outside a small 'conventicle' such as Laud would have delighted to suppress. The worshippers were hearing their morning sermon; the preacher, in loud, measured tones and with much fervour, was expounding some aspects of the Mosaic covenant. I did at Burnham what I have often done elsewhere. I went straight from chapel to 'the church,' and counted it for righteousness that I could find equal pleasure in the precincts of either.

From that humble conventicle it is, perhaps, a mile to the parish church of St. Mary. It stands, as do so many parish churches, on rising ground, close to what was once a moated residence. Mostly Late Perpendicular in style, with Decorated tower, it is a good length, but contains hardly anything of interest to an ecclesiastical archæologist. The south porch shows some grotesque gargoyles, and on the west side of the north porch I noticed a curiously ornamented niche, which evidently once held an image. Here,

again, are many quaintly-worded epitaphs among the tombs. One feature of such epitaphs is very noticeable, and is not, I think, readily explained. Some of them were certainly composed by one of the bereaved persons, who had doubtless worshipped regularly at the church for several, perhaps for many, years. Such persons must have known verses by heart from their youth up, and must surely have felt, however imperfectly, something of the stately rhythm of our Common Prayer. And yet, as many a headstone shows, they seem to have been wholly unable to test a simple verse even by the ear. Here are two examples of such churchyard doggerel :

'May we not for her loss repine
For our loss though heavy is her gain ;
Tho' husband, child and friends dear
Would fain have had her linger here.'

'But now our Friend is Gone
And God would have it so,
He can no more to us return
But we to him must go.'

Two others near them run as follows :

'Releas'd at length from cares and ling'ring pains
Here peaceful sleep a Mother's loved remains
In charity she lived—in peace she died,
Her Husband's joy her Children's friend and guide.'

'Here lies one beloved by all
But the Lord did please for her to call,
Death at her door did knock full soon
Her morning sun was set at noon.'

I must add, however, in justice to the village versifier, that many of these verses in God's-acre are excellent if judged from the sentiment they evince rather than by the language in which that sentiment is expressed. Wordsworth, in an essay upon Epitaphs, admirable alike in phrase and discrimination, has laid it down that the first requisite in such compositions is that it shall speak, 'in a tone which shall sink into the heart, the general language of humanity as connected with the subject of death—the source from which an epitaph proceeds—of death and of life. To be born and to die are the two points in which all men feel themselves to be in absolute coincidence.' This dictum of Wordsworth was not in my mind when I copied these verses in Burnham Churchyard ; but readers will notice that three out of the four exemplify in some measure that salient characteristic upon which he insists.

I have hinted that Burnham has many attractions for such as love boating and the waterside. For others the town itself, now so rapidly altering

its aspect by the addition of new houses, is hardly interesting. As a centre, however, it has considerable advantages. You may spend an enjoyable holiday by staying at an inn—several of them are excellent—and, as Essex folk say, faring forth to adjacent villages day after day. The ferry will put you across to Wallasea Island, where, on bright days in spring, you may wander happily enough towards the saltings, whence you may survey Foulness in the distance, with the Roach winding between the two islands. In the depth of winter you may get as good a freezing on Wallasea as on any island I know; moreover, you may very probably meet no living soul to pity your case. Eastward you may wander over the Burnham and Southminster marshes—a country of truly Flemish aspect, thickly marked by 'Wicks' on the map, and therefore more extensively devoted to the cultivation of dairy produce in the past than it is to-day. These large expanses of marsh and marsh-like ground are divided, not by hedges, those dearly-loved landmarks of the Englishman, but by dykes, where tall bulrushes lift their conspicuous heads as though to keep an eye upon their surroundings, and water-voles play at hide-and-seek among the decaying herbage.

Westward, a half-hour's stroll along the wall will bring you to the ferry near Cricksea, Creeksea, or Crixea—you may, I believe, spell it according to taste—and here, close to the stile, a large bell hangs upon a pole. A vigorous pull at the ropes, and the bell clanks out so sonorously that the ferryman at the inn on the opposite side of the Crouch, half a mile away, will hear the summons, pull his boat across the river, and carry you back with him for threepence. Perhaps few persons are equally indispensable. During your rambles in Essex you may arrive at Creeksea late at night, or in the small hours of the morning; it may be raining and be dark as pitch; a cruel nor'-easter, a 'crannying wind,' as Byron calls it, may make your teeth chatter as you feel for the bell-rope. But if you ring with exemplary diligence, wakening the echoes with the uproar, you are certain to be 'fetched off,' and may even find a bed at the inn.

As I write, Mnemosyne plucks me by the ear, and bids me call to mind, albeit as in a glass darkly, the happy hours passed, ten years ago, in the neighbourhood of Burnham-on-Crouch. The memory of those hours is still fragrant. I travelled from Liverpool Street one afternoon with

several relatives, and we found accommodation in a pleasant cottage midway between the station and the quay. Early in the morning, beneath what Hazlitt would have called a Claude Lorraine sky, we watched the doings of a lads' brigade then camping in the neighbourhood. I remember that we discussed oyster-culture with our host, himself engaged in the industry. I remember, too, that here I first read Zola's 'Downfall'—particularly that awful description of the surgeons at work in the amputating-sheds. Later we hired a trap and drove through Southminster to a spot near Bradwell Quay, where we gathered bulrushes from an inland creek and watched the brown-sailed barges creeping up the Blackwater with the flood-tide. We lunched at an inn near the waterside, and drove back to Burnham in the quiet afternoon, passing tiny cottages where roses peeped at the windows or clambered to the roof, and huge sunflowers stood as sentinels beside cobbled pathways or looked at us over rustic gates or low brick walls. Is the tea ever so fragrant as after such an outing as that, or the conversation so unstudied; or do the impressions then received ever quite fade from the mind? The one regret is that the companions of our way

are so soon separated, and that it becomes impossible for us to reconstruct the past by comparing notes, 'with interchange of gift.' One of those who then shared my holiday was gifted with unusual powers of observation and memory; but her recollections sleep with her at Highgate, where so many hopes lie buried, and these reminiscences can receive no additions from her ever-willing hand. Let Omar Khayyám embody this regret in a single quatrain:

> 'Lo! some we loved, the loveliest and the best
> That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest,
> Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
> And one by one crept silently to Rest.'

XIII

MY ISLAND

'An island always pleases my imagination, even the smallest, as a continent and integral portion of the globe. . . . Even a bare, grassy isle, which I can see entirely over at a glance, has some undefined and mysterious charms for me.' So wrote that entirely delightful saunterer, Thoreau, and his utterance has my heartiest approval. I know an island that fulfils at least those minimum requirements of his which I have quoted. It is very small ; it is bare and grassy ; from its centre I can survey it from end to end ; it has, at least for me, charms which are wholly undefinable. So jealous am I of those charms that I will not divulge my island's name, but it may be found by those who seek it in the Marsh-Country of which I write.

One afternoon in September I came down to the creek that separates my island from the neighbouring coast. The morning had been warm,

with intermitted sprinkles of rain ; there was but little wind, and that from the south-west. The tide was just turning to the ebb, and hardly a bird was in sight; but I knew that the dunlins and redshanks would be here presently, to dabble and flutter and call among these winding waterways. Before crossing the creek I whiled away an hour at a spot where patches of thyme grow almost in the water, and meadow-browns flutter weakly over sow-thistles and yellow hawksbeard. Such situations are little favoured by butterflies, most species preferring the well-stocked flower-garden, the stony edges of cornfields where the pimpernel and wild forget-me-not blow, or the bankside. A solitary red-admiral passed me presently, and two or three small whites; otherwise the meadow-browns had it all to themselves. Northward my eye wandered over stretches of cultivated upland, where rich pastures alternated with yet unharvested cornfields—a country such as Constable loved to paint. Looking southward, across my island, I saw an almost deserted landscape, featureless save for a few farmsteads : in the far distance some rooks were drifting in a tangled skein—such a scene has often inspired the genius of B. W. Leader. Do you think these allusions strangely associated?

Look at Constable's 'Cornfield' in the National Gallery, or at those beautiful proofs of Leader's 'At Evening Time it shall be Light' in the picture-shops in London, and ask any Essex man if he does not recall such scenes in his own county. The picture is so often not far to seek: it is the artist who is lacking.

On the foreshore of the intervening creek there lay a long heap of broken rubbish, in form like a kitchen-midden, consisting of ashes, potsherds, broken tinware, brickbats, a little earth, and I know not what besides. I could not regard it as picturesque; but I found it interesting. For the heap was covered thickly with a most incongruous growth, which flourished exceedingly in that unpromising soil. Tomatoes, sturdy in habit, grew here and there among flowering potatoes; barley, plump enough in the ear, thrived side by side with many belated oats; pimpernels looked out from beneath shepherd's-purse. One sometimes expresses astonishment at the way in which an artificial mound is speedily covered with vegetation; but the process is one which may be closely watched, and the watching may be with profit. One thing soon becomes apparent; when we remember how quickly many seeds germinate, and

how living things increase in a geometrical ratio, we perceive that, were it not for birds and for race antagonism in the vegetable world, such heaps would be covered even more speedily.

I have pleasant memories of early hours passed at this spot. It is a sheltered spot, for the island lies between this creek and the wider waters, and the uplands of the main shelter it from the northern blasts. This fact is well known to the gulls, who found it out for themselves, I will vouch for it, very many centuries ago. After a stormy night they seek this island back-water in great numbers: conspicuous amongst them is the kittiwake, which, singularly enough, is comparatively scarce on the Medway. The creek is almost dry at low-water, and, although shallow, its bed is several feet lower than the level of the island. Very early in the morning the gulls flock to the leeward side of the creek; you may see them, mere whitish spots, dotting the mud terraces which have been sculptured by the tides, or hovering over the barges in expectation of food. I love to come down to the spot where I can ford the creek, for the bed is firm at the crossing, and a hundred tiny rivulets of water gleam and glitter as they pass, making a continual murmur among

the stones. I have stood here when the island was shrouded in mist, and nothing was to be heard save the siren of a steamer far out at sea, the piping of the kittiwakes, or the whistle of a railroad engine on the mainland. I was as completely separated from the world as heart could wish.

It was here that I passed over to my island on the September afternoon which I have mentioned. I had journeyed thus far because I wished to spend an hour or two face to face with Nature, and knew of few spots where I could do so more effectively. About half a mile from shore a small bridge spans a creek which is almost dry at low-water; rough boggy land forms a small basin for the creek, sufficiently depressed to afford considerable shelter from the keen winds that sweep over the island so frequently throughout the year. I approached the spot cautiously, wishing to keep the bridge between myself and the bed of the creek. This I accomplished; then, peering across to where the tide was creeping onwards inch by inch, I saw that my quest was not in vain. Nearly a hundred dunlins were within twenty yards of the bridge, some wading in the water, some standing upon the stones, some flitting restlessly here and there, as if the better to scrutinize the dark brown mud in

which they find their food. So close was I that I watched the continual bobbing of their heads, and could see them thrust their long, straight bills through the shallow water. Suddenly, as by some internal impulse, one would fly a few yards, turn, fly back again, and, alighting upon a stone, would stretch and preen its wing, standing squarely on both legs. Not, I think, until their dressing was finished did they stand upon one leg only—first on one and then on the other—looking quickly from side to side. All the while they chattered in a thin, shrill voice: how the dunlin's note is usually written I do not know; to me the sound resembled *peet-peet-peet-peet*, uttered rapidly and almost without intermission. I am writing, however, of many birds together. I have never been sufficiently close to a single dunlin to mark how frequently it repeated its note.

At right angles to the creek lies a deep ditch, its western bank honeycombed by rabbits. Later in the afternoon, as the sun was nearing the horizon, I went down upon my hands and knees and crept slowly towards a large bushy sloe that faces the warren. Then, lying quite flat upon the bank, I peered round the sloe and waited. I wanted to watch the wild rabbit near his own

doorway; nor did I have long to wait. First a youngster, perhaps four months old, popped out of his hole with such comical precipitance that I almost laughed aloud, for he seemed to forget the proximity of the ditch, and ran, indeed, so far without turning that he half leaped, half fell into it. One by one his companions followed, and their gambols were most diverting. If you have never watched two rabbits rush together and then leap into the air, I advise you to take an early opportunity of doing so. They enter into the spirit of the pastime with evident gusto, but are not, I fear, averse from hitting below the belt. Soon they wandered farther afield, lopping leisurely here and there over the marshy pasture that stretches from their burrows to the saltings; I counted thirty at one time. As I have mentioned, the sun was sinking, and presently, when a rabbit was almost hidden in the grass, I could still see his erect ears, shining with a peculiar pinkish hue by reason of the sunlight behind them.

Close by I watched the antics of some water-voles in a narrow dyke. It is hard to believe that these wary little animals do not perform many of their journeys for frolic's sake alone. I

have watched them peep stealthily out of their hole, look this way and that, venture out a few steps, then, for no apparent excuse, dart back as if in terror of their lives. Presently, if I remained perfectly still, the head and shoulders would be once again thrust out, again the vole would venture forward, only to beat another hasty retreat. But sometimes, after several of these preliminary canters, I have seen one stray farther afield, working its way forward in irregular, zigzag fashion, first a short run to the right, then to the left, reminding me of Thoreau's description of the progress of a squirrel. Suddenly the sleek brown body will stop: down goes the snout among the trodden sedge or rush; a succulent morsel is selected, and the vole, sitting upon its haunches, chews it with evident relish, turning it about in all directions. I have often seen several close together on a big tussock, and was delighted as a boy to surprise them with a clay bullet from a catapult, and to watch the *sauve qui peut* of voles as they fled in different directions. The voles on my island are less timid than others I have watched elsewhere, perhaps because they know little of the bloodthirstiness of man or of the rapacity of dogs.

When the saltings on my island are bared by the retiring tide, a soft, salt breeze, very pleasant in the nostrils, comes towards me from the long stretch of foreshore, where many seaweeds lie. At times this breeze can barely sway the bulrushes in the dykes; at times, again, it blows so boisterously that only the sea-fowl delight to make headway against it, and every pool and creek shivers continually in silvery agitation. But my island is sheltered between two mainlands, and often enough the unclouded sun looks down upon it hour after hour, while the bee hastes from petal to petal, and the larks circle upwards in the blue, mingling their voices with the sound of the mower as he whets his scythe on the marsh.

XIV

IN THE COUNTRY OF 'MEHALAH'

When the Rev. S. Baring-Gould wrote his novel entitled 'Mehalah,' he did for Essex almost as good a service as the late R. D. Blackmore, by his 'Lorna Doone,' did for Devonshire. I am not concerned with any comparison of the merits of these two famous books. Both are powerful novels, skilfully conceived and well written, and both have interested a multitude of readers by their presentation of very real, but very dissimilar, heroines. I cannot say whether Devonshire men and women appreciate Blackmore's great romance as they should, for I am a stranger to their beautiful county; but I know that in many a humble home in Essex you will see the familiar red covers of 'Mehalah,' and will find that each copy does excellent service, passing from hand to hand as books are wont to do when once they are recognised as imperishable treasures of that

fairy world of romance which has so large a share in the sweetening of men's lives.

The pleasures of a walking tour are greatly enhanced when we are acquainted with the history and legends that time has attached to the neighbourhood through which we wander. I am going to ask readers to walk with me from Peldon to Goldhanger, and as I may fairly assume that this book will be chiefly read by Essex folk, I may premise that the district through which we shall pass is emphatically the country of 'Mehalah'—a country where folk live, for the most part, lives of pastoral quiet, and where many aspects of life are to-day surprisingly like those which obtained very many years ago. It is a country where the postman goes his rounds upon a bicycle, blowing his whistle whenever he approaches a house, as a call to the inmates to bring out their letters, and where the housewife, when she washes the stone before her doorway, scribbles upon it a few figures of truly Runic type, after the fashion followed in Pembrokeshire and some few other counties.

Mehalah was but the creation of a writer's fancy, so far, at least, as concerns her character and doings as a whole ; but that need detract but

little from our interest in her life. What man among us, voyaging in the far Mediterranean, ever troubles himself with doubts touching the personality of Ulysses? I am not, of course, going to summarize her story here, but passing reference to incidents so strongly connected with certain villages hereabouts may beguile our way. The name Mehalah is borne by women in Essex to-day, and may be seen on a tomb in the churchyard at Great Wakering, as probably in many other places. Folk on Mersea Island will tell you that the book is 'true history,' and will point out persons whose ancestors figure in its pages.

The country of which I write is at no point more than a few miles from the sea; it comprises, indeed, most of that stretch of broken marshland which lies between the Blackwater and the Colne. Centuries ago it must surely have been one of the most unhealthy districts in England. We know that the dwellers on these marshes, as in other districts of which I have written, suffered terribly from ague, of a type more distressful than is known to-day. Far back in prehistoric times this disease is believed to have been so common, and so closely associated with the dank atmosphere of the lower

marsh levels, that the inhabitants often burned heaps of clay, arranged them in circular mounds, and built upon those mounds the huts in which they dwelt. These mounds were scattered everywhere beside the creeks; they have been traced on Tollesbury Marsh, on Salcott Marsh, on the shores of Mersea and Pyfleet Channels. The tradition as to their origin is strengthened by the fact that, while they contain many such relics as we would look for on the site of a hut—fragments of pottery and bone and rudely-chipped flint—they are destitute of any human remains, and were certainly not raised as burial-mounds or barrows. Their locality will be indistinguishable in a no very distant future; for the level of the marsh has gradually risen until in some cases they are already obliterated, and elsewhere they have been levelled by man.

In spite of modern drainage, large tracts of saltings are still flooded at high-tide, and the country of 'Mehalah' is a happy hunting-ground yet for the botanist and the sportsman. When Mr. Baring-Gould was Rector of East Mersea the wild-fowl were more plentiful than they are to-day, but his description of the natural features of this semi-amphibean country is still approximately

accurate, and is perhaps better than any penned since. 'At high-tide the appearance is that of a vast surface of moss or Sargasso weed floating on the sea, with rents and patches of shining water traversing and dappling it in all directions. The creeks, some of considerable length and breadth, extend many miles inland, and are arteries whence branches out a fibrous tissue of smaller channels, flushed with water twice in the twenty-four hours. . . . In summer the thrift mantles the marshes with shot satin, passing through all gradations of tint, from maiden's blush to lily-white. Thereafter a purple glow steals over the waste, as the sea-lavender bursts into flower, and simultaneously every creek and pool is royally fringed with sea-aster. A little later the glass-wort, that shot up green and transparent as emerald glass in the early spring, turns to every tinge of carmine. When all vegetation ceases to live and goes to sleep, the marshes are alive and wakeful with countless wild-fowl. At all times they are haunted with sea-mews and royston crows; in winter they teem with wild-duck and gray geese. . . . The plaintive pipe of the curlew is familiar to all who frequent these marshes, and the barking of the brent-geese as they return

from their Northern breeding-places is heard in November.'

The country slopes upward abruptly from the west of Mersea Channel, and on the summit of this slope is scattered the village of Peldon, which sustained a vigorous shaking from the earthquake of 1884. Midway between the village and the channel stands an old windmill ; near by, on the opposite side of the way, is the Rose Inn, said to have been standing there a century ago, with a vine scrambling over its red-tile roof, and on the tiny green that still fronts it a standard sign displaying a huge rose. To this inn, as the story runs, came Mehalah in search of employment and of protection from the loathsome courtship of Elijah Rebow. It is a pleasant enough spot when at high-tide the sunlight sparkles on the waters of Mersea Channel, or smiles upon the green hillside that stretches beyond, crowned by the battlemented tower of St. Mary's Church. When, early in the year 1903, I crossed over from Mersea Island by the Strood causeway, the clouds were threatening rain, and before I reached the village the shower burst. It was mid-day ; no soul appeared abroad, and for some time I sought in vain for any house of rest. At length

I saw an inn some distance away, and it was long before I had finished looking at the old sporting prints upon the wall and chatting with the landlord, who related his memories of wild-fowl-shooting on the adjacent marshes. He told me, too, that the church at Langenhoe, less than two miles distant, was entirely destroyed by the earthquake already mentioned, and that a new stone building was erected soon afterwards in its stead.

By repute I knew the district between Peldon and Virley to be out of the beaten track ; before dark I was to find it a country where wise folk, when journeying thereabouts, secure their lodging betimes. I had been walking on Mersea Island many hours ; on leaving Peldon I wended my way towards Great Wigborough. It was growing dark ere I saw the old Church of St. Stephen on the hill-top : I met few persons on the road, and heard few sounds saving the bleating of sheep and the cawing of a long tangle of rooks as they sought their refuge on the tree-tops. I do not think I was ever so weary in my life before ; I was, as folk say in the new novels of adventure, 'dog-tired.' How this had come about I cannot say, for I have often walked very much farther without discomfort ; but the fact was only too

palpable, and I felt that I must call a halt. I thought to obtain tea at a cottage, and, if I liked its inmates, to lodge there for the night if possible. I had reached the confines of Virley Marshes, and coming presently to where a light shone from a casement, I rapped boldly at the door. The good wife, as the event proved, was above-stairs, and was very deaf. No other person was in the cottage, and I knocked in vain. After awhile I assaulted the door with a violence comparable to that of Richard the Black Knight when he summoned Friar Tuck, and the assault was successful. Footsteps, not of fairy lightness, were heard upon the stair; the fastenings were removed, and the good wife thrust her head round the half-opened door. She was sorry, but she 'never made no tea for strangers.' Did she know where I could rest awhile and get a meal? No! nobody in those parts took lodgers. How far was it to Virley? Nearly two miles, and unless I was very careful I should miss my footpath by the burrows, and find myself quite abroad. I thanked her civilly and withdrew.

To my great surprise, as I presently crawled round a corner, utterly worn out and faint for lack of refreshment, I came to an inn at the parting of

the ways. The landlord was the embodiment of civility, and I was soon cosily ensconced by a blazing fire, busily discussing an excellent meal. I thought of Hazlitt drinking 'whole goblets of tea, and letting the fumes ascend into the brain,' and could sympathize with his happiness as I have seldom done before. Two other men came in whilst I was enjoying my rest, and talked continually on so many topics foreign to my experience or reading that I insensibly wearied, and at length fell asleep. When I awoke they were still at their glasses, and were both talking at once; but I got their attention after awhile and stated my troubles. I learned, much to my relief, that I could probably get a bed at the Sun at Salcott, a village on the creek, opposite what was once the village of Virley, which has now almost disappeared. So I pulled myself together and went out into a darkness that might indeed be felt. I found the footpath to which I had been directed, and stumbled on until I came to the ruins of Virley Church. Thence, crossing the little bridge that spans the creek, I passed down the street of Salcott, and saw before me the Sun, formerly known as the Rising Sun, and as such immortalized in the pages of 'Mehalah.'

Early in the morning I walked out to view the ruins of Virley Church—the church where Mehalah Sharland was married to Elijah Rebow by the Rev. Mr. Rabbit. The description of this wedding should be read by all who would know how marriages were sometimes 'solemnized' a century or more ago; for, ludicrous as the description is, it is drawn by one learned in all ecclesiastical and parish lore, and is probably more accurate in detail, as a reproduction of the past, than many more pretentious narratives. The passage is far too long to quote, but I may summarize its points. We have first a description of the church. The 'nots' in the Decalogue had been erased by a village humourist; a worm-eaten deal table did duty for an altar; the curate's red cotton handkerchief was the only altar-cloth. The floor of the chancel was eaten through by rats; the bones beneath were exposed to view. The congregation consisted chiefly of a few young folk, who snored sonorously, or cracked nuts, or adorned the pews with rude sketches of ships. On the wedding-day a motley crowd assembled to see the fun, and the tiny church was crowded. In the west gallery boys dropped broken tobacco-pipes on the heads of persons below; a sweep,

unwashed, pushed forward and took a seat beside the altar ; the Communion-rails were broken down and the chancel filled with a noisy, squabbling mob. Pen and ink were with difficulty found, while the sight-seers exchanged uncomplimentary sentences aloud in the presence of the Rev. Mr. Rabbit. The bridegroom was arrayed in a 'blue coat with brass buttons and knee-breeches'; old Mrs. De Witt, a queer character, had thrown a smart red coat over her silk dress ; on her head was a 'broad white chip hat,' tied with ribbons of sky blue ; in her frizzled hair was a bunch of forget-me-nots. Mr. Rabbit sneezed loudly as the party gathered before him ; a squabble ensued as to the correctness of the responses ; the ring had been forgotten, and the bride was eventually married with a link from an iron chain. Then the whole party retired to the Red Hall. The story is still very real in the eyes of folk at Virley and Salcott.

The parish of Virley takes its name from Robert de Verli, concerning whom I know nothing. Mr. Miller Christy states in his 'Handbook for Essex' that the dedication of the church was to the Virgin Mary, but Mr. Baring-Gould says emphatically that its dedication is unknown, and asks,

'Who among the holy ones would spread his mantle over worshippers who were smugglers or wreckers?' As we have seen, the same writer supposes the church to have been in a ruinous condition more than a century ago, but its present aspect of bare, fragmentary, unroofed walls must be of comparatively recent date. Mr. Christy, writing of its condition nearly twenty years ago, mentions nave, chancel, and bell-turret, adding that it is 'no longer used.' Recently, when at Tolleshunt D'Arcy, I was told that the last parson of Virley used to live in that village, and my informer added that her father drove him to the church almost every Sunday for fourteen years. There was but one service, sometimes in the morning and sometimes in the evening. How long the building has been disused I cannot say. The remaining ruins are almost entirely mantled with ivy; behind what was once the altar the periwinkle flowers upon the wall; a rose-bush grows in the nave. The chancel arch still stands, supported by a band of iron; there is one window on each side of the nave, and two on each side of the chancel. Hens and chickens scratch and cackle among the ruins; near by lie the oak timbers of an old windmill; beyond, facing the creek, stands

the White Hart Inn. The creek is here so narrow that only one barge can float up with the tide as far as to Salcott. It was formerly much used by smugglers.

The Sun at Salcott is not the house to which, as the story runs, Mehalah walked in search of employment after quitting the Red Hall. The present inn is a flat-faced building of brick; the old tavern was 'a mass of gables, a jumble of roofs and lean-to buildings, chimneys and ovens, a miracle of picturesqueness.' But the inn is still patronized by the old folk of the village and district, who are learned in all the lore of Salcott and Virley, and are not loath to impart it. They told me of strange deeds done here in the smuggling days, and of a truly Gargantuan escapade of a different character, which is worth repeating. It seems that one night, whilst the men of Salcott slept, a boat crept stealthily up the creek and a small body of men landed near the church. Entering the building, they ascended to the tower, removed the bells, carried them to their boat, and before daylight were well on their way towards Holland, where they hoped to find a ready market for their unusual booty. I suppose their design was frustrated, or the facts would hardly have become

known; but I have never met with any written record of this escapade, and merely relate the story as I heard it. I heard, too, of the once popular fair, when all Salcott was *en fête*, and unlimited supplies of pork and apple sauce were at hand for all concerned. In the evening I joined a small party in the little cosy parlour; a copy of 'Mehalah' was produced, and we read together the story of the wedding, and of the dinner which Rebow gave at the Red Hall—his home upon the marshy pastures near the sea—to Farmer Coppin, mine host of the Rising Sun, the Rev. Mr. Rabbit, and several others. It was a solid Essex 'feed,' such a meal as Spurgeon warned his students against indulging in too freely, commencing with dumplings which, as Mrs. De Witt said, 'were round, plump, and beautiful as cherubs' heads on monuments.' An old man, taking his evening pint in the tap-room, was pointed out to me as one who had for years worked the decoy near by 'when the game was worth the candle,' but I missed the opportunity to interview him, and have regretted it ever since. I apologize for my inherent dilatoriness: c'est plus fort que moi.

There are many villages and hamlets within a

three-mile radius from Salcott, and all have a story to tell—traditional or historic. I have read that Salcott Creek ran much farther inland many years ago, into the heart of the extensive territory which preserves, in its local nomenclature, so many traces of the D'Arcy family. Less than two miles north-west from Salcott is a spot called Barn Hall, where an old farmhouse (unless lately demolished) stands on ground whence you may overlook Mersea Island and the sea beyond. Barn Hall was originally built by the D'Arcys: an old story attributed the selection of the site to a cause which shows how marshy the neighbourhood was in olden times. They had wished to build a castle at Paines or Paynes near by, at a spot bordered by the creek, which they could have utilized as a way of approach to their stronghold. 'But it could not be. The masons built all day, and at night the earth sucked the walls in. They worked there a whole year, and they brought stones from Kent, and they poured in boulders, and they laid bricks; but it was all of no good, the earth drank in everything they put on it, as water. At last they gave it up, and they built instead on the hill where stands the Barn Hall.' This tradition is put into the mouth

of Elijah Rebow by Mr. Baring-Gould, and there is nothing improbable in it. But there is a stranger story extant, which you may read in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1820. There Sir John Lawrence narrates that he once visited the old church at Tolleshunt Knights, which stands nearly a mile to the south from Barn Hall. There he saw an ancient monument of soft stone, supporting the prostrate effigy of a knight in armour. The knight, he adds, was believed to have quarrelled with the devil touching the future site of Barn Hall, already in course of erection. The devil was very wroth, and insisted that the house should not stand on that particular spot; so he visited the spot each night, and pulled down whatever had been erected during the day. Moreover, Satan was minded to have the body of the knight, 'whether he was buried by sea or by land, in church or churchyard.' But the knight's family managed to evade the terms of this declaration: they buried him in the north wall of the church, and, as this could not be considered as burial *in* the church, the devil was successfully frustrated. Folklorists and other like-minded persons may compare this story with that concerning Piers Shonkes of Brent Pelham, of whom I have written

elsewhere,* for the two stories have curious points of resemblance. When I passed Great Wigborough on the evening referred to, I met an old man near the church. He inquired whether I had ever been 'up to Tolleshunt Knights,' where the devil pulled a beam out of the church and flew off with it, exclaiming:

> 'Where this beam fall
> Shall stand Barn Hall.'

Thus much by way of legendary lore.

Whitethroats were singing softly in the hedges, as is their wont, as I made my way towards Tolleshunt D'Arcy. Beneath, among the long grass that overhung the deep ditches, thousands of red campions and greater stitchworts made a brave muster by the wayside. The village lies on high ground; its dominant aspect is one of exemplary tidiness. This pleasing trait was very noticeable as I paused before the Thatchers' Arms and turned to look round. On the open bank by the roadside, in the heart of the village, grow wall-flowers and forget-me-nots; there are glimpses of well-trimmed lawns and of houses beautifully covered with creepers. At the south end of the village

* 'Highways and Byways in Hertfordshire,' chap. xiv.

stands Tolleshunt D'Arcy Hall, an imposing house. The moat that surrounds it is still full of water; the buttressed walls which rise sheer above it are partly covered with ivy. The moat is crossed by a stone bridge of four arches, bearing the arms of the D'Arcy family and the date 1575. The hall contains much fine carving and panelling. Adjoining it is the Church of St. Nicholas, which I was glad to find open. In the vestry a lady was arranging a quantity of white blossoms for service on the morrow. She drew my attention to some quaint brasses and inscriptions in the D'Arcy Chapel, one of which I copied.

> 'Here lyeth Thomas Darce of Langbrooks
> in Tovlshvnt Darce, ye yongest
> sonne of Brian Darce of Sincklers
> Hall in St. Osithes, who departed
> this life ye 21 day of March in
> ye year of his Saviovr 1624.'

This 'Sincklers Hall' was evidently the 'St. Cleres' to which Norden refers in his list of 'Howses having speciall names'; it was occupied in Norden's day by 'Jo Darcye.' In the map issued by the Camden Society it is spelt 'Semtlers' Hall. St. Clere's was held by an

Essex family of that name from 1334 to 1454. About a century later the property passed to the D'Arcys, who seem, as a family, to have enjoyed common tastes in matters regarding the structure and adornment of their houses. Like Tolleshunt D'Arcy Hall, St. Clere's was a moated house, but the bridge over the moat no longer exists. Mr. Barrett found in both houses many quaint mouldings and other antique features. But this is a digression. In the south porch of the church, worn almost to obliteration by the feet of many generations, lies a slab on which is relieved a cross, with floriated extremities, such as covers the dust of many a Knight Templar in English churches. In one of the south windows of stained glass I saw the famous tulip, concerning which much ink has been spilt. It has been assigned to the early part of the seventeenth century, and is attributed, plausibly enough, to one of the many Flemish Protestant refugees who settled on the East Coast of England towards the end of the previous century, engaging themselves in the manufacture of the famous cloth known as Bays and Says. Near it is the water-bouget, the D'Arcy badge.

One who rambles in the country of 'Mehalah'

because of its associations with the book that bears her name will do well to turn aside at D'Arcy—local folk drop the 'Tolshunt'—and take the south-east road that leads to Tollesbury and the adjacent marshes, creeks and channels. There, on the Old Hall Marshes, at a spot near Bull Bars Creek, stood the Red Hall, where Elijah Rebow kept his elder brother in chains, and where Mehalah passed a few weeks of wretchedness. The Hall has long since been in ruins, but its remains are still pointed out. A more desolate situation for a homestead can hardly be conceived, and its position between the creeks doubtless rendered it, as Mr. Baring-Gould represents, a secure hiding-place for 'run' goods. His description of its surroundings holds good to-day: 'There was not a tree near it. It rose from the flat like a tower. . . . The horizon was bounded by the sea-wall; only when the door was reached, which was on a level with the top of the mound, were the glittering expanse of sea, the creeks and the woods on Mersea Island and the mainland visible.' The neighbourhood is of much interest to geologists and antiquaries. The writer of an excellent leaflet on Tollesbury refers to the submerged forest that lies near the mouth

of the Blackwater; he repeats the tradition that the Buxey Sand, south of Mersea Island, owes its name to the fact that deer were formerly hunted where ships now sail, and adds that trees are said to have been standing at the spot as late as the close of the eighteenth century. The fishermen of Tollesbury draw from the deep other spoils than 'finny fish.' Mr. James Appleton dredged up an ancient vase coated with tubes of Serpula; Mr. Harry Redhouse obtained one covered with barnacles; Mr. Harry Pettican found the tusk of a mammoth. Moreover, a very fine perforated axe-head, belonging to the Neolithic Age, was discovered in the 'river'—I suppose the Blackwater—by Mr. Drake. The leaflet to which I have referred bears no author's name, or I would gladly thank him for these interesting records.

This neighbourhood is in the heart of the Marsh-Country, but the village of Tollesbury itself stands on a slight eminence, and its inhabitants boast of its healthy climate; indeed, the whole district is very much more salubrious than in the old days of the 'ager.' In that charming book, 'An Old English Home,' Mr. Baring-Gould tells us that he once said to a yeoman in Essex, 'What! nine or ten miles from a doctor?' The answer was,

'Well, sir, yes, it is ten. Thank heaven we all in this parish mostly dies natural deaths.' The same writer adds a curious story which I may repeat in this connection. He was once told by the wife of an Essex farmer that when her lungs were troublesome she swallowed some small shot from her husband's flask. 'You see, sir,' she explained, 'my lungs ain't properly attached, and in windy weather they blows about. You know how you've got the curtain at the church door weighted with shot? That's to keep it down. Well, I takes them shot on the same principle—to keep my lungs down.' I recently took shelter from a storm in a cottage on one of those marshes, and chatted meanwhile with an old man who had passed his life in the country of 'Mehalah.' He told me that sixty or seventy years ago the ague was in 'most ev'ry fam'ly' throughout the Marsh-Country; he assured me that the neighbourhood was then more thickly wooded, and attributed the prevalence of the ague to the white mist that frequently hung over it almost throughout the day. Sometimes this malady took a chronic form. In such cases it was called the 'long ague,' and perhaps lasted for three years. The older victim could do little except crouch over the fire, when

he had one, shivering intermittently, and raising a hand from time to time to wipe away the cold sweat that gathered upon his forehead.

The afternoon was still young when I left Tolleshunt D'Arcy; the atmosphere was unusually clear, and as I approached Goldhanger by way of the 'Cricketers' the view across the Blackwater was very pleasant. I did not go down to the big decoy near the waterside, being warned that the way thither would lead me 'right round by Gore Creek,' and that there is now little to be seen. Long ago immense numbers of wild-fowl were taken in this decoy; now, as I have mentioned in an earlier chapter, it is but little used. Here, as around Tollesbury, it is sweet enough to wander upon the marshes or along the wall in summer, when careful search for the rarer flowers of the Marsh-Country will very possibly be successful, and a good field-glass may help you to study the long-legged wading birds in their native haunts. But it is a perilous land in which to expose yourself inadvisedly in rough wintry weather; and at such times I would advise the rambler to gain the confidence of cottage folk, from whom there is often much to be learned.

XV

THE GOOD OLD SMUGGLING DAYS

READERS of 'The Smuggler,' a novel by that friend of our youth, G. P. R. James, may remember a conversation that passed between Captain Osborn and Mr. Croyland. The former had remarked that he understood the county of Kent was full of smugglers.

'Full of them!' exclaimed Mr. Croyland, 'it is running over with them. They drop down into Sussex, out into Essex, over into Surrey; the vermin are more numerous than rats in an old barn.'

How numerous they were, how determined and desperate, how continuously active, is perhaps only realized by persons learned in the literature of the subject, or by those who, like the present writer, have rambled from village to village in many districts near the coast of England, sedulously gathering together the traditions of the neighbourhood.

The coast of Essex, as I once heard a Foulness islander remark, was 'made a-purpose for smugglers.' I doubt whether any county in England was more naturally suited to their designs. Kent, by reason of its nearness to the coast of France, had its advantages in the eyes of such as 'ran' goods, but, when once a cargo was near the shore, there was, perhaps, no district quite so convenient for its landing, hiding, and distributing, as the entire length and breadth of the Essex marshes. It will soon be a hundred years since the contraband traffic was really great; but, like so many other abuses, it died, or, rather, is dying, a slow death. In Essex, as in the far west of England, men still live who can tell many yarns concerning adventures and affrays participated in by their sires, either as smugglers or 'preventers'; some, after much encouragement, will even confess the sins of their own youth. Those among my readers who may chance to talk with these men need not be incredulous. There is, of course, usually a tendency towards exaggeration; but often enough the gist of such stories is true. Nor need you be sceptical should you be assured that no small quantity of contraband merchandise still finds its way into the hands of small retailers

and private consumers. I had hardly reached home after my visit to Salcott, when I noticed a significant paragraph in a leading journal. It related how a vessel had been boarded at Salcott Creek ; contraband wine, spirits and cigars were discovered, and in consequence the ship's mate was heavily fined at Colchester.

Examine a large map of Essex, and you will see how truly the county was 'made a purpose for smugglers.' Run your eye along the marvellously-contorted coast-line, from Shoeburyness to St. Osyth Point. There are at least fifty well-defined rivers or creeks or outfalls : to search the coast for some notorious gang on a dark night was to look for the proverbial needle in a haystack. And westwards, from Shoeburyness to Tilbury, the riverside was almost as convenient for this traffic. Many inns are said to bear the same name which they bore when smugglers haunted their parlours, and when smuggled spirits lay below in artfully-contrived 'hides.' What the artificial deep ways, cut on the slope of hills near the sea, were to the Cornishman, the sea-wall was to the man of Essex. Both afforded excellent shelter when goods—whether kegs, bales, or what not—were being stealthily conveyed up-country. In the

parish of Tollesbury alone there are perhaps fifteen miles of sea-wall, much of which dates back to the times when the industrious Dutchman gained both pudding and praise by his skill in rearing earthworks to resist the encroachments of the sea. The preventive officer could see nothing unless actually upon the wall, in which case, if there was light enough to serve his purpose, it also served to render him a conspicuous mark for a bullet. A revenue cutter, pursuing a small smuggling craft along one of the winding creeks in the neighbourhood of the Blackwater, could see nothing of what was going forward on land, where even the country gentleman was in league with the smugglers, often sending ponies to the appointed landing-place to bear the kegs post-haste many miles inland.

I have somewhere heard an amusing story which shows how even superstitious fears were utilized to the furtherance of contraband traffic. There was once, as the story runs, a farmer on Canvey Island named Jan Smagge. Now, Smagge noised it abroad that his house was haunted by an evil spirit, and many bore witness that at certain times mysterious sounds disturbed its inmates. It was clearly a matter for the parson's investigation ;

so one day he visited the house in company with others, and witnessed as fine a supernatural display as heart could wish. Dreadful sounds were heard, the furniture trembled violently, the windows and doors were wrenched from their positions. Strange as this was in the eyes of the parson, he would have been equally astonished could he have known what was then happening in the island church where he was wont to minister. That church, as I have mentioned in the first section of this book, was sometimes found to afford a convenient hiding-place for contraband goods during their transit from Hole Haven or the smaller creeks—then more plentiful on the island coast—to the Essex mainland; and tradition states that the séance was merely a 'got-up' affair, whereby the parson and other equally troublesome folks were kept out of the way while a consignment of run spirits was being removed from the sacred precincts.

The villages of Salcott and Virley, situated on a most convenient creek, were largely interested in the landing and hiding of smuggled spirits. A man in Salcott, whose father could tell some tales were he still living, told me that the trade thereabouts was largely in hollands, rum, and brandy;

he assured me, too, that Salcott Church had often been broken into by night and utilized as a 'hide' when danger threatened. Anybody's horse or donkey was pressed into the service of removal, and often, in the gray of the morning, keg-laden beasts were driven at full speed towards Colchester, Tiptree Heath, or elsewhere, the cargo having been landed at Salcott in order to elude the preventive men, instead of being taken farther towards the Colne. Tiptree Heath was indeed notorious as a centre for the dispersal of contraband cargo of all sorts. Nearly everybody was secretly in league with the smugglers, and the revenue officer whose duty led him thither speedily found himself on dangerous ground. There was a kind of nomadic, half-gipsy population upon the Heath who had no small share in the illicit trade in spirits and tobacco, and were troubled with few scruples if an officer fell into their hands at a lonely spot. Most of the wayside inns thrived on illicit trade, and if the revenue wished to search their cellars it was necessary to send a strong party to do so. An amusing story is told in this connection, but I believe it is not peculiar to the district. A party of revenue men, coming suddenly to the inn, have found the doors fast, and knocked loudly for

admission. After as long a delay as could be contrived, the door was perhaps opened by a child. Father was away at Colchester, or Chelmsford, or elsewhere, but if the gentlemen wished to search the house they could do so. Indoors they found nobody saving an old woman crouching over the fire, in a sorry state by reason of her ague or rheumatism. The men would search from cellar to roof, and perhaps find not so much as a run keg. The woman would have her laugh out when they had gone. Rising with alacrity from the broad stool upon which she had sat, she would remove the tobacco and cigars which she had thus artfully concealed under her spreading skirts in much the same way as Rachel concealed the images of Laban. It was not always so easy to evade discovery. A large consignment of tobacco was once quietly got ashore at Salcott, and a cartload quickly driven away towards Layer Marney. But the cart broke down on the road. Some youngsters, noticing its contents, spread the news, and the driver was arrested and imprisoned.

We may learn from the pages of 'The Smuggler' how greatly the contraband trade was in favour with almost every class of the community. The picture which G. P. R. James

there drew applied chiefly to the county of Kent, but very much the same state of affairs obtained all round the coast of England. Nor is the picture less true because it forms part of a romance. Students of English history will acknowledge the general accuracy of his description of the old smuggling days: 'Scarcely any one of the maritime counties was in those days without its gang of smugglers; for if France was not opposite, Holland was not far off; and if brandy was not the object, nor silk, nor wine, yet tea and cinnamon and hollands were things duly estimated by the British public, especially when they could be obtained without the payment of Custom-house dues. . . . Each tradesman smuggled or dealt in smuggled goods; each public-house was supported by smugglers, and gave them in return every facility possible; each country gentleman on the coast dabbled a little in the interesting traffic; almost every magistrate shared in the proceeds or partook of the commodities. Scarcely a house but had its place of concealment, which would accommodate either kegs or bales or human beings, as the case might be, and many streets in the sea-port towns had private passages from one house to another. . . . The churchyards were frequently

crowded at night by other spirits than those of the dead, and not even the church was exempted from such visitations. . . . The peasantry laughed at, or aided, and very often got a good day's work, or, at all events, a keg of genuine hollands from the friendly smugglers. . . . The clergyman shut his eyes if he saw tubs or stone jars in his way, and it is remarkable what good brandy-punch was generally to be found at the house of the village pastor.' A story told in Essex is an almost exact counterpart to that related by Stevenson in his little book on Edinburgh. In each case we hear of a revenue officer whose duty it was to visit the precincts of a friend who owned a considerable quantity of spirits; in each case the officer, willing enough to see a friend in the way of business, was anxious not to do him any ill-service by his visit. So, by mutual arrangement, the officer, when approaching his friend's store, would commence a favourite air upon the flute, thereby enabling the other man to remove any kegs or bales out of sight before he entered. The officer's conscience was in this way preserved inviolate; old acquaintances thus avoided becoming estranged; and, after all, a man, when he mixed a glass of grog at a friend's house, could

hardly be so rude as to inquire whether the ingredients had been taken out of bond or out of his host's private cache or 'hide.'

A century ago, when England was at war with France, the presence of our cruisers in the Channel did much to discourage smuggling on the South Coast. This deterring influence elsewhere seems to have led to a considerable increase in that traffic on the coast of East Anglia, ever a convenient landing-stage for spirits smuggled over from Holland. One writer goes so far as to say that at this period each public-house on Mersea Island, and elsewhere near the creeks, drew 'its entire supply of wines and spirits from contraband vessels.' Indeed, it is difficult to refute the oft-repeated assertion that the tavern-keeper invariably succeeded in bribing the coastguard; for while it is indisputable that the taverns thrived with impunity on smuggled stores, the revenue men very often succeeded in intercepting cargo destined for consumption elsewhere. There seems, indeed, to have been an arrangement whereby both parties profited: the smuggler could run his cargo up the creek under cover of night, and sometimes even in open day, with but little fear of interruption; whilst the coastguard, when his keg was empty,

could usually replace it without delay. The more troublous the times, the greater the daring of the smuggler and the laxity of the revenue men. Then, as now, it was an ill wind that blew nobody any good.

There is little doubt, as Southey has remarked, that smuggling had its beginning as soon as Custom-house duties were imposed. As early as the middle of the fifteenth century a law provided that all merchandise, whether entering or leaving the realm of England, should be forfeited if landed or loaded in creeks or small landing-places rather than at the leading ports. It may readily be conceived how obnoxious such a statute was in the eyes of many. Indeed, the law was not only from the first openly defied, but the smuggler found powerful defenders both in theory and practice. The illicit importation of wine, spirits and tobacco was regarded as a righteous warfare against unrighteous legislators. The smuggler, says a recent writer, was often regarded as a popular hero, like the *contrabandista* of modern Spain. Adam Smith describes him as a person who was doubtless guilty of violating his country's laws, but often quite incapable of violating the laws of natural justice; he would, adds the moralist, 'have been in every

respect an excellent citizen had not the laws of his country made that a crime which Nature never meant to be so.' Recently, when at Wyvenhoe, I was reminded of this aspect of the subject. The little town enjoyed an almost unrivalled position for all the purposes of contraband traffic, and it certainly made the most of its opportunities; but such stories as are still repeated concerning deeds done from sixty to a hundred years ago are usually complimentary to the hero or heroes of the story. The revenue man who was shot in some desperate affray was a tyrant who richly deserved his fate; the smuggler who perished whilst striving to place his kegs in safe hiding was a martyr in the popular cause, a hero of 'the good old smuggling days.'

XVI

MERSEA ISLAND

It was said by them of old time that Mersea Island 'might be almost kept against the whole world.' Doubtless it was regarded as a secure retreat in time of warfare by Roman, Saxon, and Dane; and almost everything that we know of its early history is connected with some story of strife. The island is hilly, and infinitely more picturesque than Canvey or Foulness; it contains considerably over 5,000 acres, and, although much wood has been cut down, it still retains many trees. Its position between the mouths of the Blackwater and the Colne was noticed by those warlike navigators who, so many hundreds of years ago, descended upon our eastern coasts like the flies of Egypt for multitude. It had been noticed several centuries before by the Romans, who built the causeway known as the Strood, which connects the island with the Essex main, and, if tradition speaks truly, erected a temple in honour of Vesta

near the spot now occupied by the Church of SS. Peter and Paul, in the village of West Mersea.

The Roman left behind him some traces of his occupation of Mersea Island ; but history records little of his doings in the neighbourhood. About the year 1730 a tessellated pavement, wonderfully preserved, was discovered at West Mersea Hall, and further search has shown that many coffins in the churchyard rest upon a similar foundation. Moreover, only a few years ago, some excavations effected in a neighbouring field brought to light the remains of a circular wall, strongly buttressed ; conjecture more or less ingenious has been advanced in regard to the true character of these ruins, but nothing, so far as I am aware, has been satisfactorily determined. Nor can it be proved that any barrow or tumulus on the island is of Roman origin.

Legend and chronicle and history offer their assistance more freely when we come to the Danes. One story I will repeat here because it is connected with what I wrote when at St. Osyth. Among the Danes who infested Mersea Island and the surrounding waters were two twin brothers, both warrior chiefs. Their desires were similar,

their ambitions one. One day early in the year 653 they sailed up St. Osyth Creek, destroyed the nunnery, and killed the saint. But this event led to a quarrel between the brothers ; for Osyth had a very beautiful sister, whom they carried with them to Mersea Island when they returned. The brothers both desired this fair prisoner, and neither would yield his claim. So it came to pass that they drew their great swords and fought together long and desperately, until neither had strength to fight longer, and presently the two brothers died. Now, when the Danes saw that their twin chiefs were dead, they did much the same as others were wont to do in those days. They took the ship in which the brothers had so often sailed, and carried it to the top of a hill since called the Hoe, overlooking the Strood causeway. Then they took the two dead men, placed the sword of each in his hand, laid them in the hold of their vessel, and laid the beautiful sister of Osyth between the two. Then they piled an exceeding great heap of earth over the quick and the dead, and all three slept together in that strange grave. But, lo ! at the time when a new moon looks upon the earth those warriors breathe again the breath of life and fight in the bowels of

the high barrow even as they fought of old. You may hear the clash of their swords as they strive for the mastery, and may hear them curse one another. Now, while the brothers are striving the maid utters no sound; but the strife ceases as the moon wanes, and then the maid is heard to weep and mourn.

This story is worthy the attention of comparative mythologists; for, as often happens, the legend accords well enough with certain established data, and seems to have been elaborated to meet the requirements of narrators. The Danish leaders who attacked the nunnery of St. Osyth are believed to have been the notorious Inguar and Hubba, who were therefore the protagonists of this strange legend—for as mere legend the details must certainly be regarded.

Hastings—that able seaman whom Regner Lodbrog employed to train his son as a sea-rover, and from whom our Warren Hastings was probably descended—sailed up the Thames with eighty ships in the reign of Alfred. This led to one of several engagements in which Alfred defeated the Danes, who, escaping through Essex, took possession of Mersea Island. The old chronicles are somewhat contradictory in their

narratives at this juncture ; but it seems certain that Alfred besieged the island awhile, having soon to abandon it in order to travel South, where matters had become still more desperate. The Danes on Mersea Island were presently joined by Hastings, who had failed in his effort to establish himself at Chester. Remaining in the island until Hastings was recovered from a wound, as the Saxon Chronicle relates, they eventually quitted it of their own accord, bearing their plunder overseas. Hastings withdrew to France, and was living there when Normandy was invaded by his countryman, Rollo the Dane.

I first saw Mersea Island from a small boat off Brightlingsea. The old man who rowed me across to Mersea Stone had a hard pull for his money ; the mouth of the Colne was rough as heart could wish, and I think my friend was not sorry when he ran the boat's nose as far in as possible, close to the hospital ship, and carried me ashore on his shoulders. I landed near the edge of Fresh Marsh, on a beach of bright, firm sand, plentifully sprinkled with thrift. An islander was mending the keel of an upturned boat ; he shouted a cheery 'Mornen, sir!' heard despite the uproar of the wind, as I hastened towards East Mersea,

passing as I went fields of tares, peas, and corn. Before I reached the church I turned into a delightful copse ; the wind dropped suddenly, and I passed nearly an hour in silent enjoyment of my surroundings, for I was journeying alone. The ground was carpeted with bluebells, primroses, and celandines. In a large hazel-bush I found a thrush's nest ; the hen was sitting on three eggs, and allowed me to touch her before she deserted them with a whirr and a cry. Summer was almost come, and somewhere in the depths of the copse a nightingale was singing its approach with 'full-throated ease.' He was very wary, nor could I see him despite my efforts to draw near without noise. I afterwards learned that a nightingale's nest had been found in the copse, and hoped the young might be safely reared to sing in other sylvan shades, other island coppice or dingle, 'where only man is vile.'

At East Mersea, as fortune chanced, I fell in with one of the Mussets of Mersea Island—a family known to have lived there for more than 500 years. He told me that he had been engaged in the oyster trade all his life, and from his dictation I wrote a few sentences which may prove of interest. Persons already versed in the subject

may compare the islander's experience with their own.

The oyster, I was told, spawns in April, May, and part of June, according to the character of the spring.* The spawn is much affected by temperature, almost from the first; a temperature of 60 or 70 degrees is all in its favour, but 'twelve or thirteen degrees of chill' is greatly to its detriment. When weak, it is at the mercy of the myriad young crabs that inhabit estuary bottoms; but should the temperature rise as high as, say, 75 degrees, the process of 'covering' is greatly assisted—indeed, the oyster can cover itself in twenty-four hours. The spat, which has hitherto floated freely, becomes whitish in colour, drops to the bottom, and growth is henceforth comparatively rapid. Oysters, added my informer, may be sold until May 12, but in the year 1903 they came late into the market. Nowadays oysters are preferred of a large size; a longer time is therefore necessary for their culture, and their cost is proportionately increased. The recent 'scare' has added much to the troubles of the oystermen of the Colne Estuary, as, indeed, elsewhere: such

* I have since learned that the spawning season in Europe generally extends into August, and even September.

oysters as once fetched £14 per bushel can be now bought for 50s. Young 'brood,' once gathered to sell at 4s. 6d. per 100, now fetch but 1s. The young oyster is called 'spat' until it is two years old, when it becomes 'brood.' The spat, while young, has to be taken off the shell, parted, and relaid. The veteran representative of the Mussets spoke despondingly of the present, but anticipated a time when the scare will have blown over and oyster-culture be again a flourishing industry.

To Mr. Beckett's 'Romantic Essex' I am indebted for some further details touching the oyster-trade. He had seen the oyster-smacks moored below West Mersea, and at four o'clock one morning he rose to join the crew of the *Vesta*, bound for the open sea and a morning's dredging. He describes the drag-nets of iron and ox-hide, drawn by the drifting boats in search of cultch, which Mr. Beckett describes as 'oyster-shells, stones, and miscellaneous rubbish, to which the spat or spawn of the oyster attaches itself.' This cultch is carefully sorted, the rubbish thrown overboard, and the young oysters, as Musset put it, 'parted and relaid.' At the same time the crew are careful to destroy those natural enemies of the

oyster that come in their way, such as starfish, which often swallow them whole, whelk-tingle, and dog-whelk. The trade is of immemorial antiquity ; there is every evidence that the Romans pursued it extensively, for wherever their works are uncovered—at least, in England—there the oyster's shell is invariably found. It was thus at West Mersea when the pavement was discovered ; it was thus on many occasions at Colchester. Classical readers need hardly be reminded that oysters are mentioned by Pliny, Horace, Catullus, Virgil, and other Roman writers, and that early in the seventh century, if not before, the Romans practised oyster-culture of a kind in Lake Avernus.

East Mersea village consists, so far as I observed, of a few cottages, an inn, and the Church of St. Edmund, where the author of 'Mehalah' was sometime Rector. The church is partly covered by 'the ivy green, that creepeth o'er ruins old'; its time-worn, embattled stone tower is a prominent object from the sea; it stands about half a mile from the island coast. The land rises gradually towards the church ; from the fields near by I overlooked the sparkling waters of Brightlingsea Reach and the saltings that fringe St. Osyth

Marsh. Those waters were dotted with small yachts and many fishing-boats. I asked a man what fish were mostly taken thereabouts. 'Sir,' said he, 'I don't just know much about it now; but years back as many as thirty boats at a time would be fishing off the island. They came from lots of places — Greenwich, Faversham, Whitstable, Wyvenhoe, and elsewhere—and very often caught great numbers of guard-fish (?) with nets. They caught plenty of bass, too, and lots of large soles; some of the best soles were taken round to the Isle of Wight.' Close to the church I passed some cottages truly beautiful for situation; they were almost embowered in fruit-trees, then in full bloom; their back-windows looked out across Pyfleet Channel and the hilly parish of Peldon. The laughter of children and some snatches from an admirably touched pianoforte floated towards me from an open doorway.

On Mersea Island, although its appearance speaks of moderate prosperity, you may meet few persons during a ramble of several miles. At West Mersea, indeed, there are many small cottages recently built, and some appearance of a more considerable population; but my friend Musset doubted if there were more than 1,500

people on the entire island. Some have left in search of larger life and more varied experience in London ; many such, I am sorry to relate, have not improved their position in life by so doing. Men from Mersea Island have gone to London and shared the fate of those recently mentioned by Mr. Percy Alden. At the docks Mr. Alden met with a man fresh from an Essex farm, for whom, and for his wife and children, the farmer could no longer provide employment. In Essex the man's wife had been skilled in the work of a dairy ; in London she added to her husband's small and fluctuating earnings by washing and charing. At Limehouse, subsequently, Mr. Alden found the family submerged indeed. One child had died ; both parents had taken to drink, and hopeless poverty had followed fast on the heels of drunkenness. The case is typical of hundreds of others. And Essex, as Lord Winchelsea said a few years ago, is a county in which 100,000 acres might be farmed for the asking. Something should be attempted in this direction, and land and people alike be thereby reclaimed.

The extreme south of Mersea Island, which faces Virley Channel, is fringed with willows between the saltings and the higher land. Local

trade in oysters employs many persons in the neighbourhood of the Victory Inn; the visitor may chance to remember the boast of Sir Aston Cokayne:

> 'The old luxurious Romans vaunts did make
> Of gustful oysters took in Lucrine Lake;
> Your Essex better hath, and such perchance
> As tempted Cæsar first to pass from France.'

It would be interesting to know upon what grounds Cokayne supposed that Cæsar could have been tempted hither by the presence of oysters. We have heard that the Romans coveted the tin of the Cassiterides, but that is another matter. Cæsar himself ('De Bello Gallico Comment.,' iv.) tells us that he resolved to pass over into Britain because its inhabitants had continually assisted the Gauls during his campaigns, and because he thought it advisable to acquaint himself with our coasts and harbours—a sufficiently plausible explanation.

The Victory affords a welcome retreat in rough weather to ramblers less amphibious than the men of Mersea—less strong to withstand those gales which blow across from Bradwell Quay or Shingle Head Point, ruffling the mouth of Virley Channel and harassing the sailing craft upon those choppy seas that eddy and swirl around the island coast.

But the wind was soft and the sky almost cloudless as I stood before the inn to take my bearings. To the south-east, three miles away, I saw through the thin haze a small, oblong, barn-like structure—all that remains of the ancient Chapel of St. Peter's-on-the-Wall. To the right, the hill before me was crowned by Tollesbury village and church; to the right, again, looking across the Ray, where Mehalah lived, I saw 'the decent church that tops the neighbouring hill' of Peldon; a wider view, or more diversified scene, is hardly to be found in the Marsh-Country. At the ebb-tide barges with big brown sails creep slowly down the Blackwater. At sunset those sails gleam red as blood; when the mouth of the Blackwater is veiled by mist they loom indistinct and shadowy as ships on a canvas by Whistler. On mornings of clear shining after rain, when a breeze has sprung up afresh and waves are maned with spray, and when boats of every rig and cut are getting under way or running for Mersea Island or Bradwell Quay or Maldon Hythe, the scene will recall the genius of Wyllie, that great painter of seascape and riverside scenery.

From West Mersea the island slopes gradually to the saltings and the Strood causeway. When I

reached the Strood an unusually high tide had entirely flooded the causeway; I had to choose whether I would wade across or wait until the waters had subsided. I decided to wait, and picked my way here and there along the margin of the saltings, the home of several plants peculiar to similar localities, and which I named in a former chapter—the thrift, sea-lavender, sea-aster, and glasswort—four littoral plants mention by Mr. Baring-Gould as characteristic of the flora of the neighbourhood. The thrift (*Statice Armeria*), with its linear, fleshy leaves, leafless flower-stalks, and round heads of rose-coloured flowers, grows in enormous quantities on the Essex marshes immediately adjacent to the sea. Less generally known, but common in certain localities, the sea-lavender (*S. limonium*), has also a leafless flower-stalk, and where growing profusely it imparts a purplish hue to the marsh, very noticeable at a distance. When the sea-lavender flowers, you will find the sea-aster (*Aster tripolium*) flowering, too; sometimes called the sea-starwort, it is the only wild aster known in Great Britain, and is found exclusively on the salt marshes and on cliffsides, where its flower-heads—the inner florets yellow, the outer purple—are conspicuous objects. On the Essex marshes I have

seen immense numbers of this plant growing closely together by creeksides, in which localities they are often covered in mud and hardly discernible. Lastly, the common jointed glasswort (*Salicornia herbacea*), a mere bundle of joints, shoots up green and succulent in the spring, and bears its pale-green flowers far into the autumn. These, and many species of flowering grass, sedge, and rush, comprise a distinctive portion of the flora of the salt marshes.

XVII

A WAYSIDE WEED

We were climbing the hill from Pitsea to Laindon one morning very early in the spring, and noticed as we glanced from the carriage window a yellow spot here and there upon the banks of the railroad cutting. I glanced across at my old friend, the botanist of our clan. 'Yes,' he said, 'it's colts-foot, out already. It's plentiful enough, but I wonder how many people know anything about it.' 'Coltsfoot!' repeated a young fellow in the corner—'why, it's that yellow thing, you know. It's what they flavour those brown sweets with. It's as common as dirt.' His remark set me thinking, and it occurred to me that I might write something of interest about this wayside weed, so common in England, so abundant in many districts mentioned in these Marsh-Country Rambles.

Before I say anything of the structure and characteristics of this weed, so common an object

that it is seldom studied, I may remark that its geographical distribution is extensive, a fact which in part explains why it bears many names. Some of these names you may find in an interesting book, 'Stray Leaves from a Border Garden,' charmingly illustrated by my friend Mr. Frederick Griggs. The old Latin name for the coltsfoot was *filius ante patrem* (not so long back our meagre knowledge of plants was locked up in Latin, which Crabbe learned in order to study botany), and to this we owe, I suppose, the rustic nomenclature, 'son afore the father,' by which the flower is known in some districts. I write 'flower' instead of 'plant' purposely, for the coltsfoot blooms before its leaves appear. In England it is also called assesfoot, foalsfoot, bullsfoot; the French call it *tussilage*, *pas d'ane;* the Italians, *unghia cavallina.* Indeed, it can boast names in several European languages; but most of them are merely the equivalent of our English word 'coltsfoot.'

Our common coltsfoot, then, the *Tussilage farfara* of that British Flora which you have, I hope, on your bookshelf at home, is a wayside flower that puts in a very early appearance. It is the only British representative of its species. Grant

Allen records having found it on a sunny January 12 ; Gilbert White saw it in flower on February 15 ; William Markwick on February 18, which coincides more nearly with my own experience. In point of fact, you may see it almost anywhere, but especially in railway cuttings, at a time when you can find little else except birds'-eyes, primroses, shepherd's-purse and early daisies, and when the hedgerows would hardly show a hint of spring were it not for the newly-sprouting ivy, the gorse, the opening leaves of the honeysuckle, and the buds on the willows. It is one of the perennial pioneers of the plant world, a forerunner even among its many congeners. Long before the rearward hosts of other genera—the heartsease and poppy, the pimpernel and campion —begin their yearly struggle for the most eligible sites on the bankside, the coltsfoot lifts its yellow, composite head, and looks the world boldly in the face. Country folk have long used it extensively, in the form of a sweet decoction prepared from its leaves, as a sovereign remedy for bronchial ills ; moreover, the dried leaves are still smoked by asthmatic persons. It is from the standpoint of the amateur botanist rather than from that of the quack doctor that I want to say a few words

about this common plant—Grant Allen somewhere calls it a riverside weed. I shall try to use the simplest language, but take it for granted that my readers have some slight knowledge of the elements of botany.

You will probably find the coltsfoot in flower near your own doorway, unless you live in the heart of a town, if you look for it in the spring. Let us examine it closely. It has, as I said just now, a composite head, which, being interpreted, means that its head, or floral crown, is compounded of many florets enclosed within an involucre, a calyx-like assemblage of bracts. For this reason the coltsfoot is numbered with that large order of plants called Composites; if you refer to your Flora, you will find it among the Radiatæ or Daisy group of this order. If you hold it against any dark background, you will see how deep a yellow its petals are—deeper, perhaps, than you had supposed; and from this fact you may take it that the coltsfoot is of an ancient and honourable pedigree. For botanists, who alone understand the subject, tell us that yellow is probably, next to green, the primitive colour of the floral world. Moreover, because it is a Composite, the coltsfoot is not strictly speaking a

flower ; it is, rather, a small colony of flowers, supported on one stem. True, they differ in structure and in function; but they are whole and perfect flowers, nevertheless, just as a sound man or woman is a whole and perfect person of the human race. And a very perfect flower the colts-foot is ; for it is nearly related to its congeners of the same order, the starwort, daisy, chamomile, and others, which represent the very head and crown of that great community, the 'fivefold' plants.

The bracts upon the stalk or scape overlap like the tiles upon a roof, and for this reason are said to be imbricated. You will notice, too, that they have a purplish appearance, and that the purple is most pronounced in tone upon the topmost bracts, because their colour is thrown into strong relief by the yellow of the outer ring of strap-shaped, radiating petals. This purple colouring matter is very serviceable, for the fickle March sunshine is thereby utilized to the utmost, the energy inherent in the solar light being the more readily converted into warmth conducive to the welfare of this early flower. Moreover, when you pull down one of these overlapping bracts, you see, hidden behind it, a membranous substance like cotton-wool, very

plastic and easily attenuated, which further assists the conservation of heat in the plant. Now divide the flower-head and scape with a sharp knife, lengthwise. The top of the scape, immediately beneath the flower-head, is hollow, and warmly lined with wool-like integument similar to that behind the bracts. The hollow is topped by a flat, circular platform or receptacle, about two lines in diameter, upon which the florets pin their foothold. These florets are of two kinds. Those on the centre, or disc, consist of a tubular corolla of five adherent petals, with vandyked edges, well turned back. Open the tube of the corolla, and with the help of a lens you will find five stamens, or male sporophylls. At the top they adhere by their anthers; but their thread-like filaments stand apart like minute columns. This peculiarity of structure induced Linnæus to give to this class the name Syngenesia. At the base of the corolla is the inferior ovary, which is one-celled and contains one ovule or seed. From the ovary rises the simple style, whose stigma, two-cleft, is enclosed within the tube of anthers as by a sheath, and does not protrude above it until later in the season—that is, until the floret reaches maturity, which the florets do not all attain at the same

time, the succession being from without inwards. The downy, make-believe calyx which surmounts the ovary is known as the pappus ; this grows quickly after the seed is fertilized, and forms the wings upon which it is borne abroad. The outer florets, known collectively as the ray, are strap-shaped, and, as you may readily see, provided with a pistil only, the female sporophyll. The corolla has, in fact, been metamorphosed at the expense of the reproductive organs. The two classes of florets are the complement of each other. The busy bee, attracted by the exterior, yellow, radiating florets, alights upon them, and, turning about, fertilizes their solitary stigmas with the polyhedral pollen grains or microspores from the disc of the last coltsfoot which she visited. The florets are thus in part sterile ; but what they lose in virility is gained in attractiveness. What they cannot do for themselves they allure the bees to do on their behalf.

How does the coltsfoot get to the place where we find it? Well, in the first instance, it probably came upon the wings of the wind. Perhaps it travelled a few yards, perhaps a few miles. When its parent reached the day of ripe fruition, one of its seed-fruit—an insignificant feathery mite, but

an embryo coltsfoot for all that—was shaken from its then precarious footing by the passing wind, and borne onwards until, sinking to less than a mere breeze, the bearer wearied even of so tiny a burden, and let it drop. You must not suppose, however, that this haphazard sowing of the coltsfoot in any way endangers the prosperity of the plant that is to be. It is necessary to remember that, although the wind carries from flower to flower the pollen grains of many plebeian plants, the seeds which it disperses hither and thither are often those of the highest patrician families—like the Composites. Indeed, the situations most favourable to the coltsfoot are not quite so readily reached by other agencies. Birds, for instance, are great dispersers of seed ; but many of the spots where the coltsfoot is commonly found are not much frequented by these busy carriers.

If the seed of the coltsfoot drops upon a spot where stronger weeds of speedy growth do not spring up and choke it, in a short time it will begin to germinate and push forth two tiny cotyledons, or seed-leaves. These contain the starch which nourishes the seedling itself, the tender tissues of which gradually harden and develop into underground stems. Yet a little

while, and the stems put forth buds; the buds grow, and, pushing themselves above the ground, assume the form of these scapes, or flower-stalks, the sides of which are covered, as we have seen, with scale-like bracts, and have a superficial resemblance to the stalks of asparagus. Several scapes usually grow close together in a clump; each of them bears a single flower-head, which droops until ready to expand, when it is a conspicuous object to the insects by which it is in due time fertilized. The fertilized flowers have the appearance of 'white feathery down,' which the wind again disperses and the cycle of coltsfoot life is repeated *de novo*. In the meantime, however, the plant is preparing its large, approximately heart-shaped leaves, of considerable thickness. If you mark the spot where you plucked the flower-head, and visit it in the summer-time, you will find the leaves, and will notice that they are green above, but underneath are covered with something very like white wool. Late in the autumn those leaves will die down; nor will you see any further signs of the coltsfoot until its scapes appear again above the ground before the winter is over.

That, in a word, is the story of the coltsfoot, reduced to the simplest terms. It tells you the

gist of what the plant does: it is difficult to state with equal simplicity how it does it. Even the most highly-specialized scientific research does little towards explaining the phenomena of vegetable life. It can, however, now describe it with a precision which is wonderful in the eyes of our grandsires—a precision which would make Malpighi, or Grew, or Treviranus stare and gasp could they revisit the world in which they did such useful work. Botanical research shows us the coltsfoot as a biological unit which lives and moves and has its being. In order to *live* it must appropriate certain soluble salts in the form of nitrates, sulphates, and phosphates, from the water which enters its roots; it must obtain, from the air which it breathes through the stomata, or pores beneath its leaves, that amount of carbon dioxide which it requires for the formation of its primary tissues. These stomata, I remark in passing, are situated over the interspaces of the leaf tissue, not on the veins or midrib of the leaf. In point of fact, the plant by these processes decomposes carbon dioxide and water and dissipates oxygen simultaneously. This is assimilation. In order to *move* it must reverse the process of assimilation, and become sensitive to stimulation through the living protoplasm in its

cells, by receiving oxygen and dissipating carbon dioxide. This is respiration. In order to *have its being*—by which is here meant the ability to successfully perform its functions and perpetuate its kind—the coltsfoot must grow ; it must multiply its cells by division, elongate them, and modify their economy. This is physiological development. To describe each of these phases in the life of the coltsfoot would be to write a treatise on Botany. I will only add that the phenomena displayed by assimilation and respiration, so far as their nature is determinable by microscopic observation and experiment, are common to all the higher forms of the vegetable kingdom ; but they vary more or less in strongly differentiated species, and it is probable that no two species are of precisely similar constitution. In the last stages, moreover, those of the development and fertilization of the seed, the organs implicated are more highly specialized in structure and function, and this specialization has evolved the infinite variety of our wayside flowers.

XVIII

THE HAUNT OF THE WATER-RAIL

BEFORE me lies a long stretch of lush meadow-land. The thin veil of morning mist that broods over the stream is stretching forth an arm to embrace the willows down in yonder bend. There is silence everywhere, save for the gentle sighing of the sedge or the voice of the dabchick when, standing erect on his grass hummock, he stretches his little wings and laughs aloud. The drumming of a snipe comes to me from the distant osier-beds, and an early angler is flicking his bait upstream to tempt some less wary trout to rise from its hiding-place on the bed of the swirling eddy. He has alarmed that dabchick before the camera can be brought to bear upon it, but I take careful note of its pollard-shaded retreat, and pursue my quest in triumph.

A literary master-craftsman, a fabricator of fine phrases, a Stevenson, a Hawthorne, a Thoreau, might pen many a deftly-worded paragraph in

praise of such richly-endowed solitudes ; but men of coarser grain must perforce content themselves with such felicity of phrase as comes readily to hand. My pathway closely skirts the water's edge. I tread along its windings cautiously, watching the tilt and tourney of the dragon-flies over the reeds, and noting the erratic flight of the tiny copper butterflies. Here, if anywhere, must lie Mr. Swinburne's 'sleepy world of streams.' Here a truant urchin is angling for minnows in the plank-spanned tributary, whilst from yonder reach a slip of a country lass is approaching with spoils of marsh-marigold and purple loosestrife. Presently the stream broadens and deserves the name of river. Rush and sedge are of ranker and closer growth, and long strands of water-weed afford shelter to whole battalions of troutlets. Splash and ripple betray to experienced ears that the water-rat is alert and seeking what he may devour. Round that islet in mid-stream a moorhen slowly steers into open water, to dive instantly on detecting my proximity. Presently, too, I reach another bend in the river, where the herbage on the marge is thicker still and seclusion is complete.

This is the haunt of the water-rail (*Rallus aquaticus*), one of the shyest birds found any-

where in the British Isles—so shy, indeed, that although the female leaves her footprints in the ooze day after day, the sharpest eye of man thereabouts will fail to discover where she has laid her young. Those who have best studied the characteristics of the water-rail have wondered how it ever gathered courage to emerge from primeval solitude or waste and draw nearer to the busy haunts of mankind. Like many other species—the heron, the bittern, and the avocet, for example—it has rapidly decreased in numbers since our ancestors left their flint implements strewn hither and thither along our river-beds for the delectation of that more scientific and bird-slaying race which was to come. But, though doubtless destined to extinction in the near future, the water-rail is at present well distributed through England, usually lurking in marshy vicinities, where it can indulge its love of solitude to the top of its bent. In Scotland and Ireland its range is limited. Mr. Gilfred Hartley mentioned it among the birds shot by him in the Outer Hebrides. It is named by recent writers as a denizen of Barbary, Egypt, India, China, and even Iceland, in which country it is said to haunt the warm springs during the winter ; but Pennant

and Strickland assign it a narrower range. A few years back it was very plentiful at Redbourn Bury, St. Albans. A good specimen in the writer's possession was shot on the boggy reach near the watercress-beds at Whitwell, in Hertfordshire, the county beloved by Walton and by Lamb, as by so many other writers.

The water-rail, sometimes called the skiddy and sometimes the bill-cock, is very seldom seen. Unlike the gannet, whose numbers on the island of Sula Sgeir, near Lewis — I beg 'Sheila's' pardon, '*the* Lewis'—are estimated at 300,000, the water-rail keeps but little company. Your chance of ever seeing one is small indeed should you lack the trained eye and ear of an ardent naturalist. Patient observation, however, is destined to reap full reward this morning. I reach the farther side of the bend already mentioned, and, sitting in silence on the half-sunken fence, watch how the river runs swiftly down its sloping bed, and eddies and swirls as it sweeps past that narrow stretch of shingle on the opposite bank. Presently, fifty yards ahead, I catch a momentary glimpse of a wild-duck drifting slowly towards me, his body under the shadow of the near bank, but the velvet, glossy head bathed in

sunshine. At the same time there is a slight movement and rustle among the rushes, almost *vis-à-vis* to my perch ; then the brown head and long bill of the water-rail emerge timorously from a tiny green arcade of rush. A short run across that few yards of clearer sandy shore, a few harsh, strident call-notes—that is all. The water-rail has sought a fresh retreat, and I shall see him no more.

When disturbed this bird does not, as a rule, take to flight. Indeed, it slinks and creeps among the herbage in a manner more suggestive of the movements of a rat than of the movements of a bird. During a severe winter, when many migrate South to sunnier climes, an individual bird may be found here and there taking refuge in a hole in ditch or bank. At such times they are very hungry, or paralyzed by fright, for they have been captured by hand in situations whence escape would have been easy.

I spent the winter of 1887 at St. Albans, and witnessed a remarkable sequence of events. One day early in November I had found a hare crouching by the furnace in the stokehole at St. Peter's Nursery. The hare, less sensible of the privileges of human friendship than the hares

of the poet Cowper, beat a precipitate and inglorious retreat. I was watching the passing of pussy, when I descried an immense number of birds approaching from the north. They proved to be fieldfares (*Turdus pilaris*). So great was their muster that half an hour elapsed ere the stragglers of the rearguard had passed. That morning a water-rail walked leisurely out of the ditch, crossed the road, and threaded its way through the coarse grass by the wayside towards Bernard's Heath. I followed in its wake, and traced its path for some distance by the impress of its long grallatorial toes in the soft drift.

The water-rail rears two broods each season—so, at least, we are assured by excellent authorities. The nest is even more sedulously hidden than that of the nightingale. It is composed of coarse herbage, such as grass or rush or reed, and is placed amidst the densest shelter of aquatic plants. The eggs vary in number from five to seven; they are not easy to describe, but a specimen formerly in the writer's possession was of olive green, spotted and dashed with reddish brown. I remember that some years ago the water-rail was known to breed freely at Tolleshunt D'Arcy.

Once more I am abroad early on a faultless

morning. I am many miles from the scene of my former ramble, but am nevertheless again bending my steps towards the haunt of the water-rail. To-day my quest leads me beside broader waters, where several tributary brooks babble noisily down the plain, to 'flood the haunts of hern and crake.' A pair of yellow wagtails are frolicking round the legs of a restive heifer standing knee-deep in the long grass on my right, and a whole bevy of swallows are describing long, superlatively graceful curves as they chase each other up and down the river. Presently I am at my rendezvous; a friend puts off in his punt from the opposite bank, and pulls across to take me aboard. We drift slowly down the tide for a couple of miles, push our punt well back among the sheltering reeds, and wait the course of events with ready camera and watchful eyes. Such a retreat would excite envy in the breast of any lotus-eater, or elicit a sigh of satisfaction from that poet who desired a lodge in some vast wilderness. The configuration of the country hereabouts suggests reminiscences of the valley of the Avon between Sopley and Christchurch, for of willows alone there are enough here to have satisfied Grant Allen.

We are beginning to feel intermittent hankerings for the contents of the luncheon-basket, when our many neighbours seem to wake to increased liveliness. Some big frogs near our anchorage are waxing restless and noisy, and grasshoppers are piping with commendable persistence from the bankside. At short intervals a coot calls from the bulrushes, which half screen from view the islet in midstream; and here and there among yonder patches of duckweed the smaller trout are rising almost momentarily, as if better to view those masses of white cloud scudding across the blue and causing a procession of shadows to pass down the river. Fortunately, we maintain strict silence, for suddenly two water-rails appear within ten yards' distance, threading sinuous passage among the rushes. We glance in the right direction, and trace the two snipe-like birds treading in Indian file, with bills turned downwards in readiness for any *bonne-bouche* that may lie in their path. Simultaneously a hearty laugh rings out from us two. In the 'interests of science' we have watched those birds with keen scrutiny, but in our excitement have *forgotten all about our camera.*

It is the love of the water-rail for swamps and marshes that renders it difficult of access. The

little that we know of its habits is occasionally augmented by some foolish fiction. Thus, Professor Alfred Newton has met persons who seriously believed that as autumn approaches the land-rail (*Crex pratensis*) gradually changes into the water-rail, resuming its former appearance with the return of spring!

XIX

ST. PETER'S-ON-THE-WALL

'About two miles north-east of Bradwell village, along the road branching off between the church and rectory, stands the ancient Chapel of St. Peter's-on-the-Wall, which is now used as a barn. It is a conspicuous object from the water, looking not unlike a haystack, but owing to the great extent of muddy foreshore this interesting building is very difficult of access except by road, as here indicated.' The chapel thus referred to by Mr. Fitch, in his 'Maldon and the River Blackwater,' is one of the most interesting relics in the county of Essex; its position is usually indicated on any good map. Standing on the very edge of the coast, and facing St. Peter's Sands, it is a conspicuous object in a desolate spot. From the north side of the chapel you may overlook on a clear day the mouths of the Blackwater and Colne, and may get a good view of Mersea Island and St. Osyth Marsh; but in 'dirty' weather,

when a misty drizzle drives towards you from Dengie Flats or the Blackwater, little can be seen save the immediate foreshore, and little heard except the call of the gulls as they hover and drift over a dreary waste. In Mr. Fitch's book there is a drawing of Bradwell Chapel by Mr. F. C. Gould, reproduced from the *Westminster Budget*.

The Chapel of St. Peter's-on-the-Wall is a genuine relic of Saxon times—the only surviving edifice of the Ythanceaster of English ecclesiastical history. Of its history we know little, but that little is of great interest. It may be summarized in a paragraph.

Cedd, a Northumbrian prelate who had been taught the Christian faith by Aidan, was sent by Oswyn, King of the Northumbrians, to reconvert the men of Essex from their lapse into heathendom after the famous mission of Mellitus. Sigbert, King of Essex, had seen something of the sweet reasonableness of Christianity on the occasion of his visit to Northumbria, and Cedd was sent into Essex at his request, accompanied by another priest. The mission was successful, and the two priests gathered around them such as should be added to the Church. After awhile Cedd went

to report his success to Finan, Bishop of Lindisfarne. Finan was pleased when he heard of Cedd's progress, and, sending for two other Bishops, he consecrated Cedd in their presence, and sent him South again as first Bishop of the East Saxons. Cedd established churches at several places, and built two monasteries in Essex, one at Ythanceaster and one at Tilbury, as we learn from Bede. It is at least probable that this monastery chapel dedicated to St. Peter was the first ecclesiastical structure in Essex of which there is any record; it is therefore all the more remarkable that, while so many churches have entirely decayed—and the very site of some is unknown—this chapel of the first East Saxon Bishop still stands, ruinous indeed, but almost certainly the identical structure erected at the instigation of Cedd.

Other doings of Cedd are indirectly of interest to Essex students of Church history, and may be mentioned here. We read that Æthelwald, King of Deira, was struck by Cedd's piety and good works, and sent Cælin, his chaplain, to urge Cedd to build a monastery in Deira on a site which he would provide, in order that the himself King might there be buried. Cedd consented, and chose that famous spot since known as Lastingham, in the

North Riding of Yorkshire. Cedd was present at the Whitby Conference in 664, where he met the Abbess Hilda and her monks. Returning to Lastingham, he was smitten with the yellow plague, and, dying there, was laid to rest in the burial-ground of the little wooden church. When the news of Cedd's death reached Ythanceaster or Tilbury—it is uncertain which—some thirty of the monks who had loved him well journeyed to Lastingham, asking only that they might live or die near his grave. All of them, 'save one little lad,' died of the plague.

But, old as this stone barn must certainly be, it stands upon ruins very much older. Eastward from it is a stretch of foreshore, where, when the tide is out, there can still be traced some remains of rectangular walls. I know a man who was present at some excavations made here thirty years ago; he remembers the strange discovery of human remains, embedded in cement, and tells me that he has seen the semi-fossilized fringes of sea-shell and other littoral débris that mark the high-water lines of succeeding centuries. The site comprised within these submerged walls embraces about eight acres, and is believed to be none other than the site of Othona, the *Castrum* of Carausius,

built by him as a defence against the invading Saxons sixteen hundred years ago, and now, like Dunwich a few miles to the north, entirely covered by the sea as it rises daily.

The story of Othona has perished as completely as its fabric, but we know something concerning Carausius, whose station it was. For a brief digest we may turn to Gibbon or to Southey's admirable summary of our naval history. Carausius, whose coins are so well known to collectors, was a Menapian of low birth who early in life distinguished himself as a soldier and sailor, and subsequently, as Southey puts it, 'first made Britain a maritime power.' In his day a fleet was formed by the Romans to protect our eastern coast and the coast of Gaul from Frisian and other pirates. The fleet was stationed at Gessoriacum (or Boulogne) 'that gave the Roman his triumphal shells,' and was placed under the command of Carausius. But the commander proved himself an unscrupulous adventurer. In the first place, he waxed rich by compounding with the pirates; then, hearing that his methods were suspected, he allowed the sea-rovers to pass safely on their outward voyages, but waylaid and robbed them as they returned. Moreover, he distributed a share

of his spoils among the men of his fleet, thereby securing his own popularity and power. At length his conduct became so notorious, and his wealth provided such damning evidence of his guilt, that Maximian, then Governor of the western division of the Empire, ordered his death. The Emperor, indeed, sent a messenger to assassinate Carausius; but the fact was evidently noised abroad, for Carausius avoided his assailant, and sailed across the Channel to Britain (A.D. 289).

Carausius persuaded the Roman legion and auxiliary soldiers in Britain to support his cause against Maximian; his revolt became a revolution, and presently he assumed the imperial purple and styled himself Emperor and Augustus. He promptly built some ships, modelled after those which he had so ably commanded for his Roman master, and from the vantage-ground of his island kingdom he defied the wrath of Maximian. Here Gibbon waxes eloquent over the fortunes of this intrepid usurper: 'Carausius still preserved the possession of Boulogne and the adjacent country. His fleets rode triumphant in the Channel, commanded the mouths of the Seine and of the Rhine, ravaged the coasts of the ocean, and diffused, beyond the Columns of Hercules, the terror of

his name. Under his command Britain, destined in a future age to obtain the empire of the sea, already assumed its natural and respectable station of a maritime power.'

Carausius probably built the *castrum* of Othona, near the mouth of the Blackwater, soon after his assumption of imperial power. The spot was eminently suitable for his purpose, for short voyages to the north, east, or south, would enable him to watch the entire East British seaboard effectively. The west wall of Othona has been traced for 522 feet. In this side was the chief entrance, the Porta Prætoria, and over this very spot, but projecting a few feet farther westward, stands what was once the Chapel of St. Peter's-on-the-Wall. Some years ago, when the adjacent saltings were recovered and protected by a new sea-wall, the workmen discovered the south wall of this stronghold of Carausius—or, rather, its foundations—but nearly all traces of the north and east wall have been washed away. At the same time many coins were dug up, mostly those of Carausius. The bases of the walls were found to measure 12 feet, and must have been of immense strength ; but the buried stronghold of Othona has not yet yielded up such treasures as would

assist us to read her history. Of the doings of Carausius, who was doubtless sometimes here, we know hardly anything; even Stukeley's well-known monograph contains little concerning his actions in Britain. By seizing the fleet at Boulogne he successfully eluded capture for the time being; but he was destined to a violent death. After a brief reign he was murdered by one Allectus, his chief minister and trusted friend.

Othona is better known to many readers as one of nine maritime towns which assumed importance during the fourth century, if not before. Soon after its presumptive foundation by Carausius it was found necessary to afford some special protection to the coast of Britain, from Lincolnshire to the Isle of Wight: forts were erected and garrisoned, and the chief governor of them all became known as the Count of the Saxon Shore long before the Saxons themselves were established in Britain. Selden, in his 'Mare Clausum,' gives the names of these towns, but their identification is in some cases hardly more than conjectural. Othona, 'in the hundred of Dengy in Essex,' is named first; the remaining eight are Dubris, Dover; Lemmanis, near Hythe; Branodum, Branchester in Norfolk; Garianum, either Yarmouth or

some place near; Reculvers, Richborough (?), on the Wantsome in Kent; Anderidos, on the Rother; Newenden; and Aldrington, near Shoreham. So this buried stronghold of Othona was a place of considerable importance before Rollo had spread his sails over northern seas; before the Danes had pillaged on the coast of Essex; before Alfred had cultivated the arts of peace or sanctified the practice of war.

It is not easy to say for how many years this ancient temple of the Lord—so appropriately dedicated to that saint who walked upon the waves and is still the patron of fishermen—has stood amid such solitary surroundings. Hardly a house is to be seen nearer than Bradwell village; Bradwell and Tillingham Marsh stretch nearly four miles to the south. The *castrum* of Carausius was occupied by bands of the Fortenses for more than a century; it was abandoned when (A.D. 410) the Emperor Honorius addressed his famous letter to the citizens of Britain, telling them that they must henceforth be their own defenders. From that time to the days of Cedd's episcopate (653-654), national records are notoriously meagre, and the condition of Othona, then known as Ythanceaster, when the Bishop was busy in its neighbourhood,

cannot even be conjectured in the absence of reliable data. We may reasonably suppose, however, that the East Saxons were sufficiently numerous in this district to call for the labours of Cedd, and sufficiently civilized to appreciate his work on their behalf.

So this Chapel of St. Peter's-on-the-Wall was already an ancient structure when, at the Domesday Survey, its neighbourhood was described as the Manor of Effecestre (more correctly Ethecastre). About four centuries later the chapel is mentioned as having a 'chancel, nave, and small tower, with two bells'; two centuries later still it was utilized as a beacon. Mr. Fitch surmises that very possibly the foundations of the Roman pharos of Othona were enlarged when the Saxon church was built by Cedd, thereby providing the base of the apse. The tower and almost all distinctive portions of the chapel have long vanished, and the mere shell remains, a solitary landmark which you may see from West Mersea, from the neighbourhood of Bradwell village, or from a boat far out at sea. To this Chapel of St. Peter, so many centuries ago, many a sinful pilgrim must have come, as Roderick the Goth came to that chapel beside the Ana, to prostrate himself before the cross. And as

Roderick was comforted by the attendant monk, so the pilgrim who sought this sanctuary in Essex doubtless found an asylum within its precincts.

'When the Monk
Beheld him suffering thus, he raised him up,
And took him by the arm, and led him in ;
And there before the altar, in the name
Of Him whose bleeding image there was hung,
Spake comfort, and adjured him in that name
There to lay down the burthen of his sins.'

XX

AN ESSEX WORTHY

GILBERT WHITE, in a letter to the Hon. Daines Barrington, expressed the opinion that 'our countryman, the excellent Mr. Ray, is the only describer that conveys some precise idea in every term or word, maintaining his superiority over his followers and imitators in spite of the advantage of fresh discoveries and modern information.' Swainson, in a chapter on the rise and progress of zoology, referred to Ray as an ornament to the age in which the great Essex naturalist lived, and claimed for him a niche in the temple of English worthies. Hallam, summarizing the consensus of expert testimony rather than expressing his own lay opinion, declared that prior to the investigations of Ray zoology had not merited the name of a science—a judgment fully endorsed by Professor Ray Lankester when he wrote of Ray as 'the father of modern zoology.' I am glad to know that there are men in Essex to-day who are

proud of the name and fame of this early English biologist, who passed the first and last few years of his life in the heart of Essex.

If you should ever visit Braintree, where Dale the botanist laboured as an apothecary, a ramble of two miles southwards from the town will bring you to the pleasant village of Black Notley, locally famous for its fine church of Norman foundation, and known to students of ecclesiastical history as the birthplace of William Bedell, who became Bishop of Kilmore early in the seventeenth century. Here, too, towards the end of the year 1628—the exact date is disputed—was born John Ray; here, or in the neighbourhood, he spent much of his time as a boy; here, after a life of exemplary diligence and piety, he returned to die. His father was a blacksmith; the son became a Fellow of the Royal Society, and his memory is honoured by all interested in the history of biological science.

A tradition, mentioned in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1794), assigned to Ray a relationship with the Reays of Bromfield in Cumberland, but without conclusive evidence. John, who during his early years wrote his name as Wray, was sent to study at Braintree Grammar

School, where he certainly laid an excellent foundation for his future acquirements. We may suppose him, however, to have gathered even more knowledge outside of the school doors. A holiday ramble would bring him to Tiptree Heath, or to the banks of the Chelmer or Blackwater, where he would find much to interest him, and would acquire that first-hand, personal knowledge of plants and birds and insects so indispensable to the biologist. It is easy to sneer at those who keep caterpillars, stick pins through flies, or fill drawers with birds' eggs ; but the practical knowledge of the collector provides a more sure-footed passage to the temple of science than the reading of many books. When, in the fulness of time, he gave his own books to the world, he gave abundant proofs of the personal nature of his learning. But he was in no haste to print, and the first thirty years of his life were devoted to a varied range of study and observation. During those thirty years Quarles, his fellow-countyman, published his 'Emblems'; meetings were held which presently led to the foundation of the Royal Society; Walton put forth his 'Compleat Angler'; Descartes investigated the laws of matter and motion ; Jonston wrote his 'Natural History of Animals';

Parkinson published his 'Theatrum Botanicum.' Everywhere men were displaying an awakened interest in both the natural and spiritual worlds.

We can hardly doubt that Ray early acquired much knowledge of our wayside plants. We must remember, however, that in those days the study of botany was largely confined to herbalists. When Ray was at school Milton was writing his 'Comus,' and the 'certain shepherd lad' introduced into that masque by the great poet was doubtless typical of many contemporaries :

> 'well skill'd
> In every virtuous plant and healing herb
> That spreads her verdant leaf to th' morning ray.'

He would on occasion

> 'ope his leathern scrip
> And shew me simples of a thousand names,
> Telling their strange and vigorous faculties ;
> Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,
> But of divine effect, he cull'd me out ; . . .
> He call'd it Hæmony, and gave it me,
> And bad me keep it as of sov'reign use
> 'Gainst all inchantments.'

Gerard's 'Herball' has been mentioned in the first section of this book. Those who have turned its pages may have some idea of our progress

in botany a few decades prior to the birth of Ray.

In June, 1644, Ray entered Catherine Hall, Cambridge, passing from that house to Trinity College in 1646. Taking his degrees of B.A. and M.A. in due course, he lectured first on Greek and subsequently on mathematics. He became deeply versed in divinity of the 'solid and useful' kind, as we know from the testimony of Archbishop Tenison, and was a sound Hebrew scholar. In 1660 he was ordained as deacon and priest by Bishop Sanderson—the Sanderson of Walton's 'Lives.' But he was destined to grapple with and expound the mysteries of the natural rather than of the spiritual world. He was an inveterate rambler. Already, in the autumn of 1658, he had wandered through the fertile midland shires of England and through parts of Wales, observing and collecting plants wherever he went, and in the year of his ordination he published his first book—a very efficient witness to the nature of those studies that lay nearest his heart and to his diligent search for plants in the neighbourhood of Cambridge. It bore the title 'Catalogus plantarum circa Cantabrigiam nascentium.' Soon afterwards he relinquished his minor Fellowship

of Trinity rather than subscribe to the Act of Uniformity, and quitted residence there the year after Isaac Newton had entered the same college. Henceforth his life was mainly devoted to the pursuit of scientific knowledge and to the publication of those many volumes in which he embodied the fruits of his industry.

In the 'Catalogus' Ray gave the names of 626 species of plants, which he also in part described. Professor G. S. Boulger—an eminent Essex botanist, to whose memoir of Ray I wish to acknowledge many obligations—points out that the 'Catalogus' provided the first list of local plants published in England. In the preparation of that book Ray had been assisted by his friend, John Nid, and was further indebted to some unpublished writings of Jung which he had received in MS. from Hartlib, the friend of Milton. From this time botany engrossed a large share of his attention. In the autumn of 1661 he accompanied a pupil, Philip Skippon, on a botanical tour, proceeding as far North as into Scotland; in the following year he went with Francis Willughby, another and more famous pupil, for a ramble in the Midlands, in parts of Wales, and here and there in the West of England.

During that memorable ramble master and pupil made a great resolve. They determined to attempt a systematic description of the whole organic world. The resolve was realized so far as in them lay. Their first preparation for so vast an undertaking took the shape of a prolonged visit to the Continent, where they watched birds, handled fish, collected plants, and generally kept their eyes open. Nothing was beneath their notice. From Ray's 'Tour of Europe' White quotes: 'The Italians use several herbs for Sallets, which are not yet, or have not been but lately, used in England, viz., selleri (celery), which is nothing else but the sweet smallage; the young shoots whereof, with a little of the head of the root cut off, they eat raw with oil and pepper.' When at Malta, Ray noticed that asses used for laborious employments had their nostrils slit to enable them to breathe more freely.

At Montpellier, early in 1666, the wandering naturalists parted: Ray returned to England; Willughby pursued his journey into Spain. 'Mr. Willughby,' wrote White to Pennant, 'seems to have skirted along in a superficial manner and an ill humour, being much disgusted at the rude, dissolute manners of the people.'

Ray himself invariably referred to Willughby in terms of admiration and endearment. We know enough of Willughby to realize that his friendship and help was an inestimable boon to Ray; his eyes were continually watching the phenomena of Nature; he was one who, as Austin Dobson says,

> 'liked to watch the sunlight fall
> Athwart his ivied orchard wall;
> Or pause to catch the cuckoo's call
> Beyond the beeches.'

The work thus inaugurated by these two naturalists was truly Herculean, but, as I have hinted, it was largely accomplished. Looked at with our twentieth-century eyes, they appear as industrious and versatile systematists, rather than as specialists in any branch of botanical or zoological research. As is well known, Willughby undertook to survey, classify, and describe the animal kingdom; Ray, the vegetable kingdom. Willughby, who died in 1672, left much rough material which Ray utilized and subsequently published with additions of his own. Thus, the world widened for Ray as he advanced towards middle life; and he who, as a boy at Black Notley, may have aspired to write the 'Natural History of

Essex,' found himself at length, like Bacon, with all knowledge for his province. Essex men have regretted that their county does not bulk more largely in the volumes of Ray; they should rather rejoice that he did not 'to *Essex* give up what was meant for mankind.' He was, indeed, one of many Englishmen who knew no restrictions to their activities; to them the whole field of biological knowledge presented an inviting prospect; they walked through the length and breadth of it; they surveyed it from Dan even unto Beersheba.

Pursuing his purpose of surveying and classifying the vegetable kingdom, Ray rambled and botanized much in Cornwall during 1667. In the same year he became a Fellow of the Royal Society. During this period he spent much time in studying the collections of Willughby, whose house, Middleton Hall in Warwickshire, was to Ray as a second home. Such devoted study soon bore further fruit, and in 1670 the publication of his 'Catalogus Plantarum Angliæ,' in which he described a great many flowering plants in alphabetical order, enhanced his reputation as a classifying botanist. It was not until 1682 that this was followed by his 'Methodus Plantarum Nova,' in

which he was heavily indebted to the labours of Cæsalpini, and of Morison, whose 'Historia Plantarum Universalis' had appeared in 1678. The publication, in three volumes (1686-1704), of Ray's great work, similarly entitled, was the crowning effort of his investigations in this immense field of natural science. The third volume of the 'Historia' was supplementary; the two former, each containing about 1,000 pages folio, embraced descriptions of some 7,000 plants; the third enumerated nearly 12,000 more! To the first volume he contributed a chapter in which he summarized the existing knowledge of the physiology of plants; so well was this accomplished that Cuvier was of the opinion that this chapter, published separately, would be the best monument to its author's memory.

It is difficult to realize how greatly our knowledge of botany advanced during the period of Ray's life; it is still more difficult for a botanist of to-day to realize how crude that knowledge was when the 'Historia' appeared. It may, perhaps, help to point my meaning if I draw a historical comparison. Theophrastus wrote his 'History of Plants' nearly 2,000 years before Ray was born, and yet, measured by the growth of botanical knowledge,

the distance between Darwin and Ray—two centuries—is immensely greater than that between Ray and Theophrastus. In the eyes of the age in which they were produced, the volumes of the 'Historia' were miracles of scientific exposition. The student of to-day smiles when he remembers that Ray, alluding to Grew's theory of the sexual system of plants, wrote of it as 'probable.' I write this merely to mark our progress, not to disparage the work of Ray. In point of fact, our text-books still embody words and methods which he inaugurated. Where he drew certain lines of demarcation we still draw them; he wrote of dicotyledons and monocotyledons, he wrote of umbels and of legumes. As a rule, he exercised that sovereign common-sense which enables a man to acknowledge and rectify his errors. Hence, while in the first edition of his 'Methodus' he based his classification on the fruit, in a subsequent edition he followed Tournefort and others in basing it upon the flower. One deterrent against an unqualified admiration of this botanist is his persistent separation of trees from herbs, on the ground that herbs are without buds; for here he sinned against light, Jung having proved that any such distinction is wholly groundless. But this

detracts little from the net result of the collaboration of Willughby and Ray—for we must never forget how largely the notes of Willughby were incorporated with those of his friend. So prominently does the work of Ray bulk in the story of botanical research that Pulteney, in his 'Historical Progress of Botany in England,' fills nearly a hundred pages with an account of Ray's life and writings.

But Ray was much more than a botanist. No sketch of his life-work, however superficial, can ignore his share in placing the study of ornithology on a scientific basis. So far as I am aware, the earliest attempt to furnish a list of British birds was the 'Pinax Rerum Naturalium' of Merrett, published in 1667. Willughby had been a diligent student of birds, and Ray, adding as usual his own materials to those of his friend, published the fruits of their joint labours, the work appearing in 1676 under the title 'Ornithologia.' Two years later he reissued the whole in English, with many emendations: 'The Ornithology of Francis Willughby, of Middleton, in the County of Warwick, Esquire. In three books. By John Ray. 1678.'

The respective merits of Willughby and Ray,

particularly in matters ornithological, have been much disputed. If we adhere strictly to Ray's own testimony, we must assign the greater praise to Willughby. Swainson, who wrote with authority on this subject, tells us that Ray merely augmented the 'descriptions and histories' ready to hand in the notes of his friend. Ray, indeed, acknowledges his debt to Willughby in the matter of classification; in his preface to the 'Ornithology' he wrote: 'Viewing his manuscripts after his death, I found the several animals in every kind, both birds, beasts, fishes, and insects, digested into a method of his own contriving.' But the fact remains that Ray supplied the touches necessary to add completeness to the whole. We know, for instance, that Willughby described, so far as possible, only those birds which he had seen —a restriction which necessarily rendered his work very imperfect. Ray went farther afield than his friend, and has himself recorded that, finding how many birds Willughby had failed to describe, he turned to Gesner, Aldrovandus, Clusius, Bontius, and others, to supply what the 'Ornithology' would otherwise have lacked. Like Raleigh, he could 'toil terribly.'

In the 'Ornithology' we find birds arranged in

two great divisions—land-fowl and water-fowl. The land-fowl are further divided into those with crooked beak and talons, and those with straight bill and claws ; the water-fowl are separated into those which actually swim and dive, and those which merely haunt the waterside. An effort is made, not without success, to further reduce this classification into sections. To the whole a key was given, and the work was illustrated—Ray would have said 'adorned'—by numerous engravings on copperplate.

Meanwhile Ray had married, his wife being one Margaret Oakley of Launton. He took up his residence at Middleton Hall, where he had previously passed so much of his time, but soon removed to Sutton Coldfield. In 1677 he at length returned to his native county, from which Essex men doubtless thought he had been too long absent, and settled at Faulkbourne Hall (local folk call it Fo'b'n 'All), near Witham, about four miles from his birthplace. The house still stands, in a pleasant country golden with corn towards the time of harvest, a gabled and turreted mansion of red brick, dating from Tudor times ; near by a winding stream flows beside green pastures, and rooks chatter and squabble on the

tree-tops. His last remove was to the village in which he first saw the light. Some years before he had purchased the house since called Dewlands, and presented it to his mother; on her death, in 1679, he went to live there himself. As a man of University education and discursive tastes, the neighbourhood around Dewlands interested him much. It was not, even in Ray's time, without its literary associations. From Black Notley village it is but a stroll to Rivenhall, where, about 1527, was born Thomas Tusser, whose poems on husbandry ran through so many editions, and whose dust lies in the Church of St. Mildred in the Poultry. Still closer to Black Notley, in a westerly direction, the fine old village of Felstead is scattered over rising ground near the river Chelmer; here young Isaac Barrow studied while Ray was at Braintree, the two subsequently being fellow-pupils at Cambridge. At Bocking, adjoining Braintree, John Gauden (also a native of Essex) was Rector while Ray was at Cambridge; he became a Bishop before Ray—who certainly never attributed to him the authorship of the 'Icon Basilike'—returned to Black Notley. There are several ancient churches of great interest in the district, and Ray, who so nearly became an

ecclesiastic, can hardly have regarded them with indifference.

We are glad to remember that, despite increasing infirmities, Ray continued his studies to the last, ever busy in collecting fresh materials, comparing data, and registering observations. His knowledge of insects was largely acquired during the last decade of his life; his 'Historia Insectorum' did not appear until several years after his death.* Again Ray embodied many of Willughby's notes; again his was the completing hand, and what Willughby had left as *disjecta membra* Ray bequeathed to posterity as an important contribution to the science of entomology. The descriptive passages in this work have been characterized as masterpieces of clearness and precision; but its classification shows little advance on preceding attempts, and Ray has been charged with merely stating lucidly what others had more clumsily expressed. The sneer is very old—almost as old as literature; we may trace it from Homer to Milton, and thence to Voltaire, who, as some wiseacre said, was the ablest man

* 'Historia Insectorum, autore Joanne Raio, etc. Opus posthumum. Jussu, Regiæ Societatis Londinensis, editum. Londini, 1710.'

alive at writing down the thoughts of other men. It has been the fashion to contrast Ray and Linnæus, to the detriment of the former, just as critics have quarrelled with Fanny Burney for not being Jane Austen. The fatuous criticism which attacks an author because he is not somebody else is perhaps even more obtrusive in the annals of science than in the annals of polite literature. Ray would have been more generously appreciated if those who wrote of his work had been more deeply conversant with the scientific knowledge of the seventeenth century. It is comparatively easy to draw contrasts between the works of two biologists when their volumes lie before us. Wise indeed was the French writer who warned us that, while art is difficult, criticism is easy.

Of Ray's labours in other fields of natural history readers may learn elsewhere, for are they not recorded in the chronicles of the kings of science? Enough has here been said to show how varied were his activities and how successfully he pursued them to fruitful issues. One other work I may name. The 'Historia Piscium' was printed at Oxford in 1686, and showed how closely both Ray and Willughby had studied fish during their

rambles. As Dr. Günther puts it, 'it is no exaggeration to say that at that time these two Englishmen knew the fishes of the Continent, and especially those of Germany, better than any native zoologist.' The substitution of data for fables and theories was a salient feature of this work; structures were compared in order that a line might be drawn between essential and non-essential divergences from any normal type; on physiological grounds, whales and whale-like animals were separated from fishes; on anatomical grounds, fishes were arranged according to the structure and composition of the skeleton. More than 400 species were enumerated and described, nearly half of which had been examined by these two pioneers in the province of ichthyology.

And yet, singularly enough, a work which Ray composed on the evidences of Christianity brought him for many years a wider reputation than all his scientific writings put together, and for this reason I have named it last. Many of us, when rummaging among the bookstalls of London, have met with a small volume somewhat quaintly entitled, 'The Wisdom of God manifested in the Works of the Creation.' Published in 1691, during Ray's second residence at Black Notley, its

success was immediate, and it has frequently been reprinted. In that treatise Ray instances many wondrous contrivances whereby Nature accomplishes her purposes; in fact, he argues from them in much the same way as Paley afterwards argued from the stone and the watch. But we moderns—even the theologians among us—are agreed that Paley has had his day; it is still more certain that Ray's treatise long since dropped into the limbo of forgotten books.

Ray died at Dewlands on January 17, 1705, while Newton was busy with his discoveries concerning the composition of light. As was fitting, he was laid to rest in the churchyard at Black Notley, where Bishop Compton and many others erected a monument to his memory. After some years the monument was moved into the church, but was subsequently replaced. His voluminous correspondence was placed in the hands of his friend Dr. William Derham (1657-1735), Rector of Upminster, who also saw the 'Historia Insectorum' through the press. His extensive herbarium was for many years in the keeping of the Society of Apothecaries; in 1862 it was placed in the only repository worthy to keep and cherish it—the British Museum. In 1844 the

foundation of the Ray Society, for the publication of works on natural history, was a fitting tribute to his memory, an efficient perpetuation of his name.

Swainson was justified when he wrote of 'the amiable and gentle Ray.' Another book from the pen of this Essex worthy bore the title 'Persuasive to a Holy Life.' There is no doubt that he was, as Macaulay said of Johnson, 'both a great and a good man.' I may close this slight sketch of a notable Marsh-Country rambler with the words of the Hebrew chronicler concerning the wisest of men: 'He spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.'

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